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Masterpieces of INDIAN BRONZES and Metal Sculpture

Introduction by
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First Published 1971

PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by Russi J. Taraporevala, for D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd., Bombay, and Printed by D. D. Karkaria, at Leaders Press Private Limited, Mazagaon, Bombay-10.

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INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY of Indian metal art invariably begins with the Indus Valley Civilisation of the third millennium B.C., though this culture may be as much as a millennium older according to some authorities. Earlier than that we cannot yet honestly go in the light of known archaeological findings. But even c. 2500-1700 B.C., the generally accepted dating, is certainly far enough back in the past and any art that originated or existed in that dim proto-historic age could rightly claim to be ancient indeed. Metal crafts were perhaps one of the oldest in India as figurines in alloyed metals have been found at Mohenjo-Daro in Sind and at Harappa in West Punjab, the two chief sites of the riverine civilisation.[1] Gold cups encrusted with gems have been mentioned in the Rig Veda, and many of the precious ornaments found at Taxila (the ancient Takshashila) are much like the jewellery of the Greeks of the fourth century B.C. The *Ramayana* speaks of guilds of jewellers, blacksmiths, workers in copper, armourers, and makers of idols, among many others. Finds of objects of gold are now known from Harappan times, though not actually abundant. The Indus Valley gold is pale in colour and the finds include beads, armlets, pendants, brooches, personal ornaments of varied kinds, and needles. However, it is fairly certain that silver was relatively in more common use, probably because of easier availability in this country, and the paler colour of the Harappan gold may be due to a more than usual admixture with the cheaper and whiter metal.

Antiquity

When the well-known figurine of a dancer (Plates 2 and 3), 10 cms. in height and made of a bronze-like alloy, a figure full of a coarse inviting sexuality, and the copper bull of Plate 1 were discovered at Mohenjo-Daro, both exhibiting all the signs of technical virtuosity and sophisticated imagery, they rightly created great interest among scholars of Indian art. Not only did these and many other similar finds push back the frontiers of India's cultural activities to the third millennium B.C., but they also testified to the antiquity of a knowledge of the technique of metal alloying and casting in the country even at that remote age, and to a remarkable degree of aesthetic and imaginative feeling. What the Harappan Culture really was, we may never know: who were the people who created it; whence they came—if they came at all from outside the frontiers of the

Indus Valley Civilisation

[1] Articles made of copper have been found at Amri, Kot Diji and Kalibangan, belonging to pre-Harappan times in the Punjab and the Indus Valley. There is some slight evidence even of the use of bronze.

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Indian sub-continent—and whither they went; its script, if it be a script, remains undeciphered till this day. But its art was definitely the precursor of that to follow, though perhaps very indirectly.

Early mother-goddess figure

Another early specimen of metal art, probably about 3000 years old, is the proto-historic figure of a mother-goddess in bronze, discovered at Adichanallur in the south of India. The golden crowns found at the Adichanallur urn burial sites are also noteworthy. So also are the remarkable bronze vessels ornamented with images of rams, buffaloes, cocks, birds—and even a dog. The alloy showed on analysis to have a tin content as high as 23 per cent.

Harpocrates

A little later in date is the delightful juvenile figure of Harpocrates (Plate 4) that was found at the Sirkap site at Taxila. It is certainly a very fine specimen of early Indo-Greek art of the 1st century B.C.

That India did not soon lose her ancient skill and knowledge of metal casting in later years is certain, as is proved by the collosal copper statue of the Buddha from Sultanganj in Bihar (Plate 5), about 2.25 metres (7 1/2 feet) in height, and weighing almost a ton—a superb figure apparently clothed in a diaphanous robe, smooth, and with lightly indicated folds—cast during the age of the Imperial Guptas, probably sometime in the early half of the 5th century A.D. Today it stands serene and proud in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, drawing the eyes of all by its dominant size and sheer sculptural values, proclaiming to all the world India's manual skill and artistic heritage of old. Here is a masterpiece of plastic art full of implied "movement" in a slightly inclined body, with graceful fingers delicately holding a corner of the robe, a face passive and symmetrical, yet with the vitality of inner consciousness—"a marvellous young Indian body living and breathing beneath the transparent muslin" (René Grousset). Recently, certain scholars have cast doubt on its Gupta origin, relegating it to as late a date as the 9th century A.D. But this is very doubtful as the figure bears all the marks of the Gupta idiom and inspiration before the beginning of its decay in the 6th century.

Sultanganj Buddha

It was in this Golden Age that the formalised gestures and hand poses of religious figures, of gods and goddesses and the lesser divinities, became codified on priestly order and were perpetuated in the Shastras for the generations of Sthapatis (craftsmen and makers of images) to learn and follow.

Metals and alloys

Gold, silver, lead, and tin are mentioned in the Yajur Veda whereas the Rig Veda speaks only of gold, copper, and bronze. Iron was presumably worked at an early date and there existed a knowledge of the science of making steel—it has even been suggested that it originated in this country. It must be admitted that no signs of iron have been discovered in the excavations of Hastinapura at the later Vedic (Period I) level. However, indications of the use of iron from the very beginning are available from excavations at the Bala Hisar mound at Charsada (the ancient Pushkalavati) and the Bhir mound at Taxila, that is, from about the 6th-5th centuries B.C. But it is possible that the use of iron in

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India was even older, as it has been discovered by Prof. N. Hasan and R. Gaur in a mound at Atranjikhera, in the Etah district of Uttar Pradesh. The accompanying organic matter has been dated by Carbon-14 analyses to c. 1100-1000 B.C. But this still awaits verification. Copper was probably more in use than bronze—an alloy of copper and tin—on account of the scarcity of the latter in India. It is therefore rather surprising that the Harappan bronze had a tin content often as high as 11 to 13 per cent. Apparently gold and silver were freely used. Round about A.D. 360, in the reign of the great emperor Samudragupta, it is said a statue of the Buddha was cast in gold and silver and studded with precious stones.

The Ikshvakus

The excavations carried out at Nagarjunakonda brought to light some metal figure images belonging to the time of the Ikshvakus, who towards the close of the 2nd century A.D. succeeded the Satavahanas in the Kistna valley. Chalukyan and Kakatiya bronzes are also now known and so it seems as if the art of metal casting of images was fairly widespread and more ancient than believed previously.

Early images

Although the few metal images discovered at Kolhapur also probably belong to the later Satavahana period, c. 2nd century A.D., and some of the earliest Akota bronzes to the 2nd or 3rd centuries, the majority of the oldest examples known are from Gupta times and they exhibit greater skill in workmanship and more refined artistic merit than ever before. As already said, it was in this Golden Age of Indian art, roughly from the 4th to the end of the 6th century A.D., if the brief Gupta renaissance is taken into consideration from the point of art-history, that the gestures and poses of the icons became codified, although probably based on much older practice.

End of the Guptas

On the decline of the Gupta dynasty, ending in chaos and confusion, arose the great Harsha of Kanauj, who during the 7th century A.D. quickly restored peace and order. A poet and a dramatist himself, he patronised artists and men of letters, and among other arts encouraged that of metal sculpture: so during his reign many large metal figures came to be cast. Recording his visit to India during the time of Harshavardhana, the famous Chinese traveller, Hsüan-Tsang (7th century A.D.), wrote that in spite of loses due to robbery and accidents, he was able to bring back with him to China over a hundred and fifty particles of the Lord Buddha's bodily relics as well as many statues of him in gold, silver, and sandalwood. According to Vincent Smith, during the sovereignty of Harsha of Kanauj, in a large monastery on the banks of the Ganges, there stood a statue in gold of the Buddha, as large as the king himself. Such was the great skill of India's craftsmen in metal working and casting.

Once again came a period of strife and chaos. The powerful rulers warred among themselves. The art of metal statuary deteriorated in quality. The refined idiom of the Gupta age vanished, to give place to florid ornamentation and inferior workmanship. Then, by the end of the 10th century A.D., invaders of the Islamic faith began to enter Hindusthan from the north-west, ultimately giving a death-blow to most of the totter-

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ing Hindu kingdoms, and in time bringing almost to an end all Hindu cultural and artistic activities, especially in the northern regions.

Isolated regions

Fortunately for the culture of India, the iconoclastic invaders did not penetrate every nook and corner of this vast sub-continent and in isolated regions like Nepal and Tibet, the ancient art of metal sculpture and casting continued to exist, greatly influenced by the highly distinctive style of the Pala and Sena artists of Bihar and Bengal of the 8th to the 12th centuries.

Palas and Senas

Under the patronage of the Pala rulers, under whom Buddhism underwent a brief revival—to be followed by the Brahmanic Sena regime in the middle of the 11th century A.D. till they were overthrown by the Islamic invaders in A.D. 1197—a distinctive and superior style developed as exemplified later on in this brief Introduction.

The Deccan

The art and craft of metal statuary and sculpture also existed, and more or less flourished, in the plateau of the Deccan, lying between the Narbada and the Tungabhadra rivers. But here too the craft of image casting in metal dwindled almost to ceasing point with the invading Islamic armies from outside the Indian frontiers, ravaging hordes that ransacked the country and reduced it to rack and ruin some time in the 14th century A.D., setting in abeyance the glory of India's great cultural heritage.

The Pallavas

It was once believed that Indian metal sculpture in the South did not antedate the rise of the Cholas. But the few specimens now discovered and proved to belong to an earlier age has shown that metal images of a high aesthetic and technical quality were also produced under the Pallavas ruling from Kanchi, who continued in the South the Satavahana and Ikshvaku traditions. Karl Khandalavala writes :

"In A.D. 600, the South was ready for a religious upheaval such as was seldom witnessed in any age. Buddhism had failed to maintain its original outlook and had lost all its early vigour. . . .

"Metaphysical speculations were all well for learned men, but the masses were groping for a creed which would not entail intricate mental pocesses and which would provide an anchorage for storm-tossed spirits. It was not a new creed that suddenly revitalized the whole South. It was the doctrine of Bhakti, but it was presented in a manner, and with a vigour so new, that it assumed almost the aspect of a new religion. This revival was brought about by a band of hymnists whose songs reveal such frenzied devotion to the Lord Shiva that one is not surprised at the manner which their emotional outbursts invigorated simple minds. With two such hymnists as Appar and Sambandar living in the same century, little wonder that the dominant ruling house of the Pallavas in South India during 600-700 A.D. became ardent patrons of the great Shiva legend. . . .

"In the reconsideration of the chronology of South Indian bronzes it is to the Pallavas of Kanchi that we must look for the beginnings."[1]

[1] Vincent Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, third edition revised by Karl Khandalavala.

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The Cholas

Undoubtedly the most important phase of metal sculpture, especially the icons, flourished down south from the Tungabhadra river to the extreme southern extremity of the peninsula, reaching its pinnacle of perfection sometime in the 10th-11th centuries under the Cholas of the Vihayalaya line, ruling from Thanjavur (previously Tanjore). So high was the artistic sense and the technical skill of the Chola age that their art of metal casting could have only been the heritage of many generations of knowledge and experience. But the artistic outpourings of the Cholas were not confined to metal sculpture, however fine. Rajaraja Deva and his son Rajendra Chola Deva, ruling in the 10th to the 11th centuries, also erected many fine temples and palaces—superb masterpieces of architecture and sculpture in stone. Perhaps the largest number of metal icons were cast in the reign of Kulotunga Chola, heir to the Chola and the Chalukya alliance, who in A.D. 1074 became the supreme overlord of the Chola empire.

The Cholas were worshippers of Shiva as the supreme Lord, and his consort Parvati. Naturally then the metal images of the period represent these divinities in their various aspects in the greatest profusion. "They have been universally acclaimed as the flower of the artistic genius of South India," says Chintamoni Kar. But the fall of the Chola power was imminent and almost complete by the 13th century A.D. And once again the Pandyas of Madurai rose to power, but this last phase only lasted for about a century.

Vijayanagar empire

At this time, five Hindu brothers founded the Vijayanagar dynasty (A.D. 1336-1565), which continued to prosper and flourish, exhibiting a splendour all its own, reaching its zenith under the artistic Krishna Deva Raya. But soon after the combined conquering armies of the Bahamani Sultans entered the Deccan, and by the 16th century A.D., the end of the mighty Vijayanagar empire was in sight. In A.D. 1565, the powerful fighting forces of adjoining Muslim states sacked the capital Vijayanagar, "the City of Victory," and the battle of Tallikota rang the deathknell of the once great empire. "Nothing seemed to escape them. They broke up the pavilion standing on the huge platform from which the kings used to watch festivals and overthrew all carved work. They lit huge fires in the magnificently decorated buildings forming the temple of Vithalaswami near the river and smashed its exquisite stone sculptures. . . . Never perhaps in the history of the world has such havoc been wrought, wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city teeming with a wealthy and industrious population in the full plenitude of prosperity. . . ."[1] So perished the once mighty Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, unexcelled for its wealth, luxury, and grandeur, stretching from sea to sea, occupying all the land south of the Kistna river.

The Nayaks

The art of casting icons was patronised by the Nayaks who rose to power in the 17th century A.D. after the destruction of Vijayanagar; but the original art and skill was ebbing fast and no great masterpieces were

[1] A. Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire.*

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produced. The style had now become unduly ornate and a mere travesty of the past.

South Indian bronzes certainly deserve a more detailed study as outlined a little later.

* * * *

The alloys

Although commonly called bronzes, the old metal icons that have come down to us are generally made of copper or brass as said before. Apparently, bronze was hardly ever used, perhaps due to the scarcity of tin. Maybe this reluctance to use bronze was the result of the Hindu belief that it is an impure alloy (copper and tin) for the casting of divine figures. In the South at least, the ideal and most highly cherished alloy was the Pancha Lauha or "Five Irons," consisting of gold, silver, copper, brass, and white lead. In the northern regions of the country, however, the Astadhatu was considered the most desirable—an alloy of gold, silver, tin, lead, iron, mercury, zinc, and copper. But for most purposes, pure copper or brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) was considered sufficient. In a later period, an alloy consisting of 20 parts of copper, 1 part of brass, and 1 part of white lead came into common use.

The Sthapati in ancient India

In ancient India, the worker in metal was held in high esteem, finding mention even in the Yajur Veda, an earthly counterpart of the Vedic Tvashtri, the artificer of the gods, working in the celestial smithy to fashion articles of beauty and weapons of war for the gods—the skilful worker who forged the thunderbolts of Indra. Vishvakarma of the Puranic age was the Architect of the Heavens, the Supreme Craftsman, and thus he and Tvashtri, identified as one, find an important place in Hindu mythology. In the Puranas, there are clear indications that architects, carpenters, craftsmen and the workers in metal were held in great honour. Theirs certainly was an assured place in the social hierarchy of those very early years.

Cire perdue technique

The technique of casting used in India was invariably the *cire perdue* or "lost wax" process, described as *Madhuchchhishtavidhana* in the ancient Shilpa texts, with minor variations.[1] In brief, the figure was first modelled in wax, delicately and simply, yet expressing all the anatomical details and the grace of the human figure. This was next covered with coats of ever increasing thickness of a special clay mixture containing rice husks and other toughening ingredients, leaving openings at the top and bottom. The clay coated model was next heated to melt the wax core, the carefully and lovingly made figure, which was then allowed to drain off through the lower openings and the molten alloy poured in from the top, the liquid metal taking the place of the original wax model, filling each nook and crevice. Now the clay coat was broken apart and the cast figure removed, to be further chased, chiselled, and embellished with simple hand tools, and finally burnished for use. In the case of very large figures,

[1] There is archaeological evidence to prove that the *cire perdue* technique was not only known in Harappan times, but used with great skill to cast human and animal figurines.

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a central core of a light metal was inserted in the wax model, that is, the wax model was formed over the metal core. On casting this remained, thus reducing the weight of the figure, as the core was always of a metal much lighter than the alloy used for the casting of the image.

Details of the method

Perhaps a few more details of this interesting and ingenious method of image casting may be desirable at this stage.

In the Ghana or solid method of casting, the image is first fashioned in beeswax—often coloured yellow to give a better idea of the final product when cast in copper, bronze, or brass—mixed with other ingredients like castor oil, camphor, frankincense, etc., to form a thick semi-liquid on heating. Allowed to cool, this soft clay-like material is now modelled into the form of the figure, and as much as possible of the details, ornamental embellishments, and other refinements worked on the wax original.

The wax model with all its details is next covered with a coat of very fine clay, if possible procured from an ant-hill, and mixed with rice husks and other similar combustible materials. At first, this clay is thinned down considerably and applied almost as a solution, enabling it to enter into all the hollows, crevices, and details of the figure model. Later, thicker coats are applied, the last coat being a thick lump of clay. While this is being done, care is taken to make holes in suitable places for the molten wax to pour out of at a later stage and funnel-like apertures are also made at the top through which to pour in the molten alloy.

The clay coated model is now carefully dried in the shade, sunlight and heat being avoided to prevent cracking of the clay coating. After a few days of slow drying, the mould is ready for casting. It is carefully baked in a blazing fire, its intensity raised even further by means of air blown in with a pair of leather bellows just as the blacksmith does in his smithy. The wax naturally melts and runs out of the holes conveniently made for the purpose.

When all the wax has drained out of the clay mould, it is again heated slightly and the molten metal, pure or alloyed, poured in from the top through the funnel-like openings. Care is taken to see that the molten metal fills up each and every part of the clay mould, fills each and every hollow and detail, the shallowest depression, the narrowest crevice. This alone would produce a perfect cast. Any excess of the molten metal naturally overflows from the openings through which it has been poured. The mould with the molten metal in it is now allowed to cool, the baked and burnt clay is carefully broken away, and the cast figure gently removed. If the original wax effigy is very carefully made, as it used to be in the past, very little finishing is required, except for the removal of a few burrs and cleaning up here and there. But later on, after the 18th century onwards, not so much care was exercised in the first modelling of the figure and so the resultant cast was comparatively rough, requiring a considerable amount of finishing with chisels and gravers. It may be said that the more the finishing ultimately required, the poorer the craftsman, the less his artistic and technical skill.

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Hollow casting

Another method of casting, the Shushira technique, was also occasionally followed. A model in clay was first made and this was coated with a layer of wax to reproduce exactly the subtlety of the form and its details, refining it wherever necessary. The worked up wax was again covered with a thin coat of fine clay. When dry, further layers were added until the desired thickness of the outer shell had been attained. The whole was then heated till the wax melted, running out through holes left for this specific purpose. Thus a space was left between the original clay form and the covering clay coats, identical with the model, and into this the molten metal was poured, filling up the area between the model and the clay mould, reproducing all the fine details of the image. When cooled and hardened, the outer clay shell was broken apart, and the metal figure further chased, chiselled, and polished. Thus a light cast, hollow inside, was obtained, the thickness of the shell depending upon the thickness of the wax model between the clay core and the heavier clay mould.

The method first described produces a solid figure, needing a great deal more of the casting metal and thus increasing the cost and the weight of the icon.

Ancient texts

The *cire perdue* technique, as followed in India from times of old, is described in many ancient manuscripts prepared for the use of the Sthapatis and the guild of image-makers. Probably the most detailed description for casting solid images is given in *Manasara*, a literal translation of which by Sarasi Kumar Saraswati appeared in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1936. The translation though not very readable is certainly accurate and informative. The Western Chalukya king Someshvara III of the 12th century A.D. also has given details of image casting in his famous encyclopaedic work, *Manasollasa* or *Abhilashitartha-Chintamani*.

Although the *cire perdue* technique is capable of the finest results and can follow exactly the Sthapatis's original model in all its finest and minutest details, it suffers from the one great fault of being a one-time process—only one cast can be obtained each time and no duplicates are possible. Perhaps this is not so much a disadvantage from the strictly aesthetic point of view, but rather a distinct help to creativity and craftsmanship. Every image thus has to be an individual piece of art.

It should not be thought that the "lost wax" technique is solely an Indian method of metal casting. It was known and practised in Europe and elsewhere as well. It has been described in great detail by the master-craftsman Benvenuto Cellini, the Florentine sculptor and goldsmith of 16th century Europe. It is now almost certain that the famous bronzes of Benin in Nigeria, a purely Negro art, were also made by this or a similar method.

The Murtis

The Murtis or images of gods and goddesses are classified as Utsava Murtis and Dhruva Beras. The former are primarily meant for temple use, to be carried about in ceremonial processions. The latter, very large and heavy, were however cast for the main shrines of the temples,

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although these were often carved in wood or sculptured in stone, and were not moved once ceremoniously installed in the sanctum. Of course, many small images were also made for private worship in the home.

The Shastras

Unfortunately, the canons laid down in the ancient Shastras as to the techniques and the codified patterns of the images were rather unyielding and rigid, perhaps preventing the truly sensitive and creative artist-craftsman from expressing his own innate genius. But were the Shastras as strictly binding as their injunctions lead one to suppose? Were they invariably followed in all their rigidly fettering maxims by each and every Sthapati, the mere craftsman and the true creative artist alike? Perhaps it was not quite so. Perhaps even the codifiers of the Shastras understood their limitations. Perhaps they were only for those not truly great—for the good craftsman without the creative spark of the genius—who needed to strictly follow the dictates and injunctions to produce uniformly good images through the centuries, but not necessarily masterpieces of which there are really very few. In them, "Although the idiom is rigid, the actual modelling is marked by individual treatment, apparent if we compare separate figures of the same god in the same pose."[1] Listen to Sukracharya's *Shilpa Shastra Sukrantii*:

"These Lakshmis are not for thee; these laws that I lay down, these analyses of what an image should be, are for those images that are made to order for the people who would worship them. Endless are thy forms! No Shastra can define them! Nothing can appraise thee."[2]

After all, "the secret of art lies in the artist himself" (Kuo Jo Hau, 12th century A.D.).

Iconography and iconometry

The ancient texts, codified mostly between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D., enjoined that the religious images should be dynamic or static in pose, either standing, sitting, or reclining. They laid down dicta for the size and form of the figures, male and female, divine and of lesser divinity, the mode of sitting or Asanas, the pose of the arms and the hands, the Mudras or Hastas, among many other things.

Types of images

The *Sukrantii* text of old prescribes three different types of images corresponding to the three ultimate Realities: Sattva (truth), Rajas (passion), and Tamas (gloom). Thus the Sattvik image is that of a god seated in a yogic posture, with the hands granting boons to his worshippers; if shown seated on his Vahana or vehicle (explained later) and bedecked with ornaments, granting boons, and holding weapons of offence, it is a Rajasic image; the Tamasic image is always shown as a terrific fighting figure, fully armed and destroying the Asuras or other enemies of the gods or mankind.

Another classification is much simpler: Nara, man-god; Krura, terrible; Asura, demonic; Bala, infantile; and Kumara, juvenile.

Dhyanas and Lakshanas

The canons of the ancient texts consist of the versified Dhyanas that describe the spiritual characteristics and attributes of the different dei-

[1] John Irwin, *Indian Art*.
[2] Mulk Raj Anand, *The Hindu View of Life*.

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ties; and the Lakshanas that are formulated instructions regarding the exact bodily measurements of the divine images and the poses and the forms, often seemingly unnatural to ignorant eyes, they have to conform to on the basis of the Dhyanas in verse. They were to be "suggestive of superhuman and divine personality and it is by means of these unnatural poses that non-human forms could possibly be rendered in terms of human shape."[1]

Body postures

Four types of body postures or flexions have been described in the ancient texts. The exactly symmetrical pose is the Samapada or Samabhanga. The figure stands erect without any bends, the left and right sides well balanced, not deviating from the vertical. The body is thus strictly perpendicular to the base, whether the figure sits or stands.

A slight bend is seen in the Abhanga. The lower part of the body is vertical and symmetrically balanced, just as in the Samabhanga. But the upper part of the torso is slightly inclined either to the right or the left, thus imparting a feeling of flexibility and grace to the pose.

The most popular, especially in the case of goddesses and other female figures, is the Tribhanga or the triple flexions of the body. The lower limbs and the body from the hips downward are inclined to the right, while the upper part of the torso, including the shoulders, are turned the other way. Finally, the neck and the head are again bent to the right—a pose which even if rather unnatural and too contrived lends a definite grace to the female figure. In other images, the bends may be just in the reverse directions, providing a mirror image of the above. This is especially seen in the case of male figures.

The fourth type of body flexion is the Atibhanga, a much more twisted and over-emphasised form of the triple bends. The upper part of the body from the hips upward is made to turn to the right or to the left, backward or forward, in an unnaturally exaggerated sweep. The legs again may be seen to be stretched backward or forward or sideways in a dynamic expression of movement, or may just be bent in the same direction. The whole body pose is indicative of motion and fluid action, and hence is most commonly seen in the figures of Nataraja, Shiva as the Lord of the Dance, in the cycle of destruction and creation of the universe.

Asanas

The term Asana is used to designate both the mode of sitting and the seat itself, as for example, the lotus seat, the lion throne, and so on. The ways in which metal figures are to be shown seated are also rigidly prescribed by the ancient Shilpa texts, and deviations from them are rare, if ever tried. The most popular mode of sitting in contemplation is the Padmasana or Paryankasana, typically seen in the seated images of the Buddha, with the legs crossed and each foot resting on the opposite thigh. The Virasana is only slightly different. Here the right foot lies under instead of upon the left thigh. In the Yogasana also the legs are crossed, but with the knees slightly raised and thus supported by a narrow band-like Yoga-patta.

[1] O. C. Gangoly.

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The Sukhasana or Lalitasana as it is also called is the posture of relaxation, of ease and comfort. One leg is as in the Padmasana, but the other remains pendent. The "position of royal pleasure" is the Maharaja-lilasana, or Ardha-paryankasana as it is also known. In this one leg is crossed as in the Padmasana, but with the other raised, the foot resting on the seat, the knee supporting the arm of the corresponding side. The whole body leans slightly backward and is supported by the other arm which may rest lightly on the seat.

A form of seat not often seen is the Pralamabapadasana, the figure shown sitting in the Western manner as if on a chair or stool. Although some Buddha and Bodhisattva figures are found seated in this manner in the Aurangabad and Ajanta caves, this Asana is not found in Brahmanical plastic art.

Mudras (Hastas)

Many and varied are the hand gestures and poses, the Mudras or Hastas as they are termed, seen in Indian figural art, as codified in the ancient Shastric texts. The following are some of the more common hand poses and their significance, an understanding of which is desirable for a fuller appreciation of an icon.

Abhaya Mudra. The hand gesture of Assurance. The palm which is open is held outward, with extended fingers pointing upward.

Anjali Mudra. The gesture of Reverence, Devotion, and Self-surrender. This is similar to hands held together in prayer, with the palms of the two hands facing and touching each other, like the Namaste of Indian greeting.

Ardha-Chandra Mudra. The palm is outstretched to form a semi-circle between the thumb and index finger, in which is held a bowl of fire in the case of Nataraja images.

Bhumisparsa Mudra. The right hand touches the earth. This symbolises the Buddha's Enlightenment to which the earth is made to bear witness. This hand pose is naturally found in Buddha figures only who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree.

Dhyana or Yoga Mudra. The gesture of Meditation and Self-illumination. One hand rests on the other, palms upward, and both are laid on the lap of the figure seated in Padmasana.

Dharmachakra Mudra. The gesture signifying the Buddha's "Wheel of the Law"—the first preaching of the Lord. Both the hands are held before the chest, the right in the Vyakhyana Mudra and the other with the palm held facing inward.

Jnana Mudra. The gesture of Knowledge and Exposition. The tips of the middle fingers and thumbs are joined and held near the heart, with the palm turned inward.

Kataka Mudra. The gesture denoting the holding of flowers or certain divine attributes. The hands are partly closed, the index and middle fingers almost touching the thumb to form a sort of ring to denote the holding of a flower. There are many variations of this Mudra which is seen most commonly in female deities. Also called Simha Karna Mudra.

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Kartari Mukha Mudra. The third finger and the thumb are bent while the other fingers are outstretched to hold attributes.

Tarjani or Suchi Mudra. The gesture symbolising the threat of punishment. The Tarjani or forefinger of the flexed hand is held pointing upward, the remaining fingers bent into the palm.

Tripataka Mudra. The gesture seen most commonly in Shiva and Vishnu images carrying their emblems. The hand is shown raised above the shoulder, the palm facing outward. The first two fingers are held erect and slightly apart, holding the emblem. The ring finger may be bent inward to touch the thumb. Same as Kartari Mukha Mudra.

Varada Mudra. The gesture signifying Charity and Supreme Grace. The fingers point downward, the palm outward and held open. This is the Mudra used to denote that the deity is conferring a boon.

Vitarka or Chin Mudra. The gesture of Ratiocination or formal reasoning, the realisation of the Absolute. The palm faces outward, the thumb and first finger touching to form a ring, the remaining fingers kept outstretched.

Vyakhyana Mudra. The gesture signifying Exposition of the Law. Same as Vitarka or Chin Mudra, explained above.

"These ritual gestures are too often studied solely from the point of view of religious symbolism. But it is worth while to linger over them for the sake of their essentially aesthetic quality as well. Never, indeed, has the spiritual value of the hands—these flowers of the flesh, which hold within their chalice the whole of human tenderness and thought—been comprehended with such mystical insight. The whole of the great peace of Buddhism is contained in the gesture known as *dhyana mudra.* The whole of the Blessed One's 'power of greatness' is revealed in that *abhaya mudra,* in which, for twenty-four centuries past, half humanity has found a refuge. On the other hand, what calm assurance in the gesture by which he takes the earth as his witness; what supreme elegance—the finished grace of reason in the perfect sage—in the gesture of discussion and of the *dharma-chakra.* . . . When the Buddhist *mudras* find interpreters worthy of them, they are, if we may be allowed to borrow the language of Ruskin 'gestures of the soul,' transposing pure moral beauty into its direct aesthetic equivalent."[1]

Positional Mudras

There are certain Mudras seen in South Indian bronzes, which are not symbolic of any special inner meaning, but are just modes of posing a hand or an arm. Some of the common ones merit a brief description.

Alinga Mudra. This is only seen in composite images, as for example, those of Shiva and Parvati. One arm of each embraces the other, either round the waist or the shoulders.

Gaja Mudra. Also known as Danda (stick) Mudra, here one arm is shown stretched across the body, with the hand pointing downward. This pose is supposed to symbolise strength and power and is commonly seen in the images of Shiva as Nataraja.

[1] René Grousset, *The Civilizations of the East: India.*

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Katyavalambita Mudra. One arm is held loosely by the body, while the other hand rests lightly on the hip on the same side. The posture is one of relaxation, ease, and comfort.

Lola Mudra. The whole arm hangs down, the hand in a relaxed pose. This is mostly seen in images of female divinities when the hand holds nothing in it.

Nidrata Mudra. This also is a pose of ease and relaxation. The hand on one side rests flat on the seat, thus supporting the weight of the body on that side. Naturally, this pose is seen only in sitting figures.

Tala system of measurement

Although the figures of gods and goddesses and other divine beings are always given a conventionalised body form, often with additional heads and limbs, the artist was allowed greater liberties when depicting semi-divine and human beings like the Apsaras and the Gandharvas, the heavenly dancers and musicians respectively, the Yakshas, Yakshis, and the Asuras.

The Shilpa texts laid down strict injunctions as to the exact measurements to be adopted for divine figures. In the ancient works, the unit measure is given as the Tala—"a quarter of the width of the artists' own fist is called an Angula or finger's width. Twelve such finger widths is the measure of a Tala."[1] The Angula is further divided into still smaller units, each eight times smaller than the one previous. The face from the top of the forehead to the chin formed the unit of the Tala or twelve Angulas. The texts further prescribed ten Talas (Dasa-tala) as the measure to be used for the height of gods in their gentler or more pacific aspects, but when shown in their heroic moods, this was to be increased to twelve Talas. In their ferocious or demoniac aspects, the measure could be increased to as much as fourteen Talas. In comparison, goddesses and minor deities are to measure nine Talas in height (Nava-tala), mortals, eight Talas (Ashta-tala), and children, six Talas in height. Thus, the mode of enlarging or reducing the size of the figures was used in Indian sculpture to denote the more important and the less important, separate the gods from the goddesses, the divine from the mortal. In short, the more important the god, the larger his relative measure. Within each Tala measure, the figures could be Uttama (highest), Madhyama (medium), or Adhama (lowest) in reference to the number of the Angulas. Thus, a god cast in the Dasa-tala measure should actually be 120 Angulas, as Madhyama figures are. But the relative measure of an Uttama image may be as large as 124 Angulas, while the Adhama may be only 116 Angulas in size. Of course, in spite of the exact and rigidly precise measurements laid down in the Shastric texts for each and every part of the body, there were many exceptions to the rules and practice, especially as these measurements often differed in the different parts of the country or according to which text the Sthapati obeyed.

The representation of the divinities

Like the Asanas and the Mudras, the general linear measurements and the relative proportions of the different parts of the body, the number of heads and limbs, all other details of a divinity's representation are

[1] A. N. Tagore, *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy.*

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prescribed in the ancient texts, as for example, the mode of dressing the hair, the many ornaments to be depicted on the body, the weapons, symbols, and other objects to be carried in the hands or associated with the god or goddess. It would be inadvisable to go into such details in a mere Introduction, especially as there are books on the subject and even English translations of some of the original Sanskrit works that could be studied by the deeply serious reader. But perhaps the following brief points may be of interest to all for an intelligent understanding of India's plastic figural art, whether in metal or stone.

Hair styles and coronets

The hair styles and the coronet if any is depicted are rigidly prescribed, at least for the chief divinities. The Jata-mukuta is coiffure that looks like a coronet. The matted locks of the hair are twined together to form a tall crown on the top of the head. When shown on images of Shiva, a skull, a cobra, and a crescent moon appear in it together with other ornaments. But these three chief symbols of Shiva are absent when the Jata-mukuta is worn by Brahma. Vishnu is never shown in this crown-like hair style.

The head-dress peculiar to Vishnu, his different Avatars (incarnations), and his consorts, is the Kirita-mukuta. This is like a small conical cap with an ornamental top and a large jewel in the centre in front. The rest of the headgear is generally decorated with small designs.

The Karanda-mukuta is like an inverted bowl and with few ornaments. This is the coronet of the majority of goddesses, especially when shown with their consorts, and it is also seen on the images of minor deities. However, the goddess Saraswati is sometimes shown with the Kesha-bandha, a hair style in which the hair is neatly knotted at the back, often with floral garlands. The hair may even be shown tied round a ring at the top. This variation is also characteristic of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, herself the goddess of wealth and good fortune.

Ascetics and even some saints are often depicted with matted hair tied together. Shiva is thus shown in one of his aspects, when he wanders round the two worlds of heaven and earth with a beggar's bowl in his hands —the Great Ascetic. Sometimes the ends of the hair may be left loose and allowed to spread out like a fan. This is most common in the images of Shiva as Nataraja in South Indian bronzes, the fanning out of the hair symbolising the whirlwind reaction of the frenzied dance.

Head-dress rather reminiscent of the present day turbans is often seen on the images of semi-divine beings like Yakshas, Nagas, and their female counterparts. It may be said that generally speaking the headgear becomes smaller and less complicated with descent in the divine or social hierarchy. The larger and more ornate the head-dress, the higher the rank of the person, and this rule applied equally to deities and human beings according to the Shastric texts.

Jewellery, ornaments, and apparel

Jewellery and ornaments are common on images, sparing or profuse, simple or massive, depending on the date and provenance of the sculpture. As a matter of fact, they form a good key to the identification of the period in which a figure may have been cast (see page 40). So many are the

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personal adornments that mention can be made here of only a few of the more important ones and of some of the other items of apparel.

Kundalas. These are ornaments for the ear, in several designs, sizes, and grades of ornamental elaboration. The most ornate are the Makara-kundalas, in the form of a crocodile-like creature. The greatest gods wear them in both ears; those slightly below in rank, wear one in the right ear only, with a plain ear ornament in the left. Undecorated ones are seen in both ears in the case of lower divinities and goddesses when shown with their consorts. The Patra-kundala is in a leaf pattern and is often depicted.

Rings. Rings are generally present on all the fingers and sometimes even the toes.

Hara. Necklaces are worn by all deities. They may be short or hang low down on the chest. The latter are indicative of a later date of the figure. The necklaces vary a great deal in size and intricacy of design, and a description of the different varieties is beyond the scope of this Introductory note, and in any case would not be of much use to the general reader.

Udara-bandha. This is an ornamental band round the waist, simple or elaborate. It may be worn like a scarf with fluttering loose ends. The Udara-bandha is most especially seen in figures of Nataraja in the gyrating motion of his eternal dance.

Kacha-bandha. This is seen worn by goddesses and is a band across the breasts as a form of support. The ancient texts prescribe which Devis are to wear the Kacha-bandha and who must not.

Kati-bandha or Kati-sutra. This is the belt or band round the hips holding up the loin cloth. It may be very ornamental, forming a girdle with a number of strings, or may be shown as a sash-like band with a decorative clasp. Tassels may hang down festooning the sides or there may be bows on either side.

Keyura. This is an ornament with a floral design, commonly seen worn on the biceps together with armlets over the elbow.

Kankana. This is a bracelet worn on the wrists, plain as a rule, and most commonly seen on the images of goddesses and lesser divinities.

Kirita. A crown.

Kanthi. A necklet.

Nivi-bandha. This is the term applied to the knot of the lower garment of females.

Ekavali. The name for a single-strand pearl necklace.

Stanhara. A long necklace falling down the chest to reach the navel.

Channavira. This is the cross-belt worn generally by warriors.

Valayas. Wristlets, mostly plain, and of many differing forms.

Vanamala. This is a long flower-garland only seen in images of Vishnu or representations of him in his many Avatars (incarnations).

Urumalai. This is a minor decoration, a festoon hanging from the girdle round the hips and down one thigh.

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Vaijayantimala. Only seen on images of Vishnu and Vaishnavite representations, this is a long necklace worn in addition to the other usual ones. Mostly composed of groups of gems, each group containing five.

Yajnopavita. This is the sacred thread of the Hindus of the Brahmin caste, chiefly made of cotton. It is seen on all divine images after the Gupta age. It crosses from the left shoulder to the right side of the waist, but in early images, it is often allowed to fall over the right forearm. In later times, the Yajnopavita is no longer a simple narrow ribbon, but becomes twisted and ornamental. Sometimes it is shown with one end dividing into three at the level of the waist, the two outer ends passing round the body, the central branch hanging loosely in front. This variation is most commonly seen in images of Vishnu as Krishna and of Devi.

The Mani-yajnopavita or Mukta-yajnopavita is a sacred thread composed of pearls. When made up of flowers, it is known as Pushpa-yajnopavita.

Vahanas

A study of Indian figure sculpture, especially in stone, will show that specific animals or mythical creatures are often associated with certain gods and goddesses, this often helping in their identification. These animate symbols are known as Vahanas, vehicles, or the mounts of the divine beings. True, the mounts are not usually seen in metal images though very common in stone sculpture; but sometimes even when cast in metal the gods are accompanied by their Vahanas. Some of the common mounts are:

Ananta. A coiled serpent—symbolising eternity—forming a bed for Vishnu to lie on during his periods of cosmic inactivity.

Nandi. The bull accompanies Shiva. It is rarely found in metal sculpture. The serpent Vasuki, a serpent-like form, often acts as Shiva's girdle and sometimes smaller ones are shown coiled round the arms and the neck.

Lion. This is the Vahana of Shiva's consort, Parvati.

Mouse. Always seen accompanying Ganesha, popularly known as the elephant-headed god, the offspring of Shiva and Parvati, the god of wisdom and the remover of all obstacles.

Parrot. This is the mount of Kama and Rati, the god of love and the goddess of passion.

Swan. Brahma's consort, Saraswati, the goddess of learning, wisdom, and the fine arts, is accompanied by the swan.

Ram. Agni, the god of fire, rides on this mount. He is one of the lesser divinities of the Brahmanical pantheon, although one of the triad of Vedic times.

White elephant. This is the mount of Indra, the Chief of the Heavens. Like Agni he also has now lost importance, although once a very important Vedic deity.

Peacock. This is the vehicle of Kartikkeya or Subrahmanyam, the many-headed offspring of Shiva, and the god of war.

Buffalo. Yama, the god of death, rides on a buffalo, especially in stone sculpture.

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Garuda. This is the mythical man-bird and when present is always associated with Vishnu who often rides on it.

Makara. This crocodile-like creature, with a deer-like head and legs, is the Vahana of Varuna, the supreme god of the oceans and the seas, and is also associated with Ganga, the goddess of this river.

Weapons and emblems

Many are the weapons, musical instruments, and other emblems held by gods and goddesses in their multiple hands. Most of them are symbolic of a particular deity and thus they provide a key to their identification. The whole subject is very confusing as the different ancient texts prescribe different combinations in the different hands. But from a study of many sculptures, a certain amount of information can be summarised, and a rough estimate made of the attributes of each important deity. Unlike the Vahanas, they appear frequently in metal images.

Brahma's symbols

Brahma, the Creator, is commonly associated with a string of beads (Akshamala), a book or scroll (Pushtaka), probably symbolising the Vedas, a water-pitcher (Kamandalu), and a spoon (Sruva, or Sruka if large) used for pouring ghee (clarified butter) on the sacrificial fire during rituals. These emblems may also be found accompanying his consort Saraswati.

Emblems of Vishnu

Like the four symbols of Brahma, there are also four chief emblems of Vishnu, the most important and consistent of which is the discus (Chakra), a weapon of war used for whirling at an enemy. It may be shown as a plain disc or it may be heavily ornamented as common in images of the later period. Another important emblem of Vishnu is the conch-shell (Sankha), used to terrify his enemies with its strident uproar and to summon his own allies. Vishnu's third weapon is the mace (Gada) that may take different shapes, but is most commonly like the standard Indian club used for doing physical exercises. The fourth emblem of his is the lotus (Padma), often shown engraved on the palm of the right hand, but never held in the hands.

Although not usually carried by Vishnu himself, except perhaps for the sword, other Vaishnavite representations may be seen with a shield (Khetaka), a sword (Khadga), a ploughshare (Hala), and a bow and arrows (Dhanus and Bana).

Shaivite emblems

A large number of emblems are associated with Shiva and Shaivite divinities of a lower rank. The most important is of course the trident (Trisula). The other symbols are the rope noose (Pasa), the battle-axe (Parasu), the top of the skull (Kapala), an elephant goad (Ankusa), the devouring fire (Agni), an antelope (Mriga), the drum (Damaru) seen in the figures of Shiva as Nataraja, the Supreme Dancer in the cosmic function of the universe. Vishnu's discus is also sometimes seen in association with some aspects of Shiva.

The goddesses

Most of the objects mentioned above as symbolic of the three chief gods of the Brahmanical pantheon may also be seen in the case of their consorts. Apart from them, the Veena, a stringed musical instrument, is almost always associated with Saraswati, Brahma's consort and herself the goddess of learning, wisdom, music, the sciences, and the arts. Rati,

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the goddess of passion, may be shown with a small hand mirror, the Darpana. Many different female deities are depicted holding the lotus, the Kamala, or the Nilotpala which is a blue coloured water-lily.

It must be stressed once again that what has been written above regarding the jewellery and ornamentation, the Vahanas, weapons, and emblems of the chief deities of the Hindu pantheon applies more strictly to sculpture in stone rather than to bronze where the image-maker would have less scope to follow strictly the injunctions of the Shastras, and also perhaps due to the greater difficulty in working on a much smaller scale. What could be successfully depicted in a large stone sculptural panel could hardly be detailed in a metal figure, maybe a foot or two high. But the important facts have purposely been given above without going into minute details, as it is felt that there can be no true understanding of the metal figural art of India without at least a passing knowledge of Indian plastic art in general, of which the bronzes may be said to form only a part, however important that part may be.

* * * *

The attributes

Sometimes the form of the divinity represented may seem strange to us, or at least to Western eyes. But it must be remembered that Indian sculpture does not aim to depict the external flesh of life, but rather the inner consciousness, the emotions—the attributes—of the divinity figured. Yet, "Indian art of all periods is close to life, not only to the life of the gods but to all creatures on earth. . . . Although the proportions, pose, and gestures of an image were unquestionably based on a strict metaphysical canon designed to ensure its fitness as an object of worship, within this framework the figure was made with an understanding of actual human anatomy, not only in its general articulations, but also in the maker's concern with connoting the essential character of the flesh in terms of stone or bronze."[1]

Greek and Indian ideals

The Greek sculptor of olden days idealised and represented his gods and goddesses in the form of human perfection and beauty. And in turn, "The Greek gods represented in themselves the ideal perfection of human beauty," says S. N. Dasgupta. "They did not involve any superior ideal or connote any superior meaning. The case, however, is different in India. Here, though the gods are mostly human figures, they are not conceived on the pattern or types of human beauty. Thus, the goddess Durga has ten hands, the god Siva has five faces, the god Brahma has four faces and so on. . . . The religious books contain prescriptions as to how one should try to form a mental picture of a god or when one should concentrate his attention in an unflinching manner."[2] The great god Shiva may have an apparently human appearance, but he is rarely depicted in stone or bronze in a perfectly human form—for no human has four arms like the Nataraja or even ten as in Shiva's more violent dance forms, the four heads of

[1] Benjamin Rowland, *Art and Architecture of India.*
[2] S. N. Dasgupta, *Fundamentals of Indian Art.*

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Brahma, the elephant head of Ganesha, or the multiple limbs of many other divinities, male and female. But as says the great Shukracharya, "Even the misshapen image of a god is to be preferred to the image of a man, however charming," especially when the misshapen form and the bodily multiplicity of heads and hands symbolise the multifarious attributes and functions of the deity as conceived by Brahmanical lore.

It must be emphasised once again that in the Indian concept, whether artistic or religious, the divinity is not primarily represented merely in his bodily form, but as a synthesis of qualities and attributes. If a god in a certain aspect needs four hands for his attributed function in that form, four hands he shall and does have.

Art and other cultural forms

The ancient literary works formed the basis on which the codification of the images took place, and once developed, the latter in their turn may have reciprocally influenced the later day literature. For in ancient India, and even in medieval times, literature and art formed a unified aspect of Indian culture, as also did music, the dance, and the drama. Music inspired Rajasthani Raga and Ragini miniature painting; the dance formed the basis on which some superb sculptures, as at Chidambaram, were portrayed. As Enakshi Bhavnani writes, "The deep and abiding ideals of philosophy and aesthetics on which the Hindu dance has been built, have also profoundly influenced the allied arts of sculpture, metal casting, frescoes and painting in India." And again,

The dance and sculpture

"It followed then that the art of the dance with its expressive forms of rhythmic movement and dramatic content, as well as the mystic allegorical divine dances representing the various aspects of God, became the subject of some of the most beautiful sculptures. One can literally see in many pillared halls of the temples throughout India, hundreds of examples of the magnificence of the mental images that sculptors of old must have drawn upon for the many dance sculptures they created."[1]

How close were the allied art-forms of the dance and sculpture, including metal figure casting, is clear from the fact that the Sthapatis often used for their images the dance gestures and bodily poses prescribed in Bharata Muni's *Natya Shastra*, a classic on the choreographic art of India. South Indian craftsmen were especially proficient in expressing through the medium of metal or stone, the different manifestations of the dances of the gods.

To repeat, in India plastic art often forms a part of the basis of the dance, and in turn the latter helps in the understanding of the principles of Indian sculptural norms. For the Indian sculptor and Sthapati it was not enough to delineate a figure in its static state. To him what was more important was the flow of motion, even if only apparent, only a suggestion. And in the Indian dance we have bodily posture, movement of the whole body, and the individual flexions and poses of the hands, the arms, the lower limbs, even the waist, the hips, and the neck. The Indian sculptor, whether in metal or stone, preferred to depict a moment of

[1] Enakshi Bhavnani, *The Dance in India.*

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life—one frozen instant, with its characteristic arrested posture and expression.

According to Indian mythology, the universe emanated from the rhythm of the dance. The world of earthly matter is destroyed and dissolved by the pulsating vibrations of the whirling Shiva-Nataraja. The dance symbolises in its rhythm and motion the creation of the universe and its ultimate dissolution. "Dance is perhaps the epitome of the rhythmic motion of life," says S. N Dasgupta. Thus in human or divine representations, whatever the mode of expression or material of execution, the flesh, the muscles, and sinews of the living body are of no importance to the Indian artistic mind. For they melt and flow inevitably under the compelling force of rhythmic motion. The sculptor tries to realise a tiny fragment of that spontaneity of the life-movement.

* * * *

The Art of the Guptas

The art, the true aesthetic feeling, if not the knowledge or skill, of metal casting perhaps evolved during the reign of the Imperial Guptas, from the point of view of cultural history, from A.D. 320 to 600, including the brief renaissance, with its chief schools at Nalanda, Sarnath, and Mathura. The figures of the gods and goddesses of this Golden Age of cultural synthesis, which reached the zenith of its greatness under Chandragupta II Vikramaditya (A.D. 375-415)—the age in which Kalidasa, the great poet and dramatist, lived and wrote his immortal classics—show a certain elegance that is characteristic. The body form is slim and graceful, the apparel diaphanous in treatment, the hair rendered conventionally in tight curls, to seem almost like a wig in the case of the male figures, especially the Buddha. The spaces between the fingers of the latter are often blocked as if webbed. A kindly aura pervades all—there are few if any demoniac aspects. The Buddha especially stands or sits calm and pensive, always compassionate, always benign. Many of the Brahmanical representations may have an unnatural number of heads or limbs, but in spite of this apparently unnatural idiom they do not lose their human form or appeal. Here is not the sensuousness, the lure of the flesh of the school of Mathura of the Kushans, nor the dynamism of the later medieval age; but only calm contemplation, inner serenity, and quiet religious fervour, especially when dealing with Buddhist themes or the anthropomorphic Buddha. The Brahmanical art of the Guptas remains cheerful, smiling, and humane—the gods of a contented and happy nation. Rarely has the grace, freshness, and submerged vitality of these sculptures been surpassed at a later date, and they can stand comparison even with the masterpieces of Chola metal art, albeit the latter more forceful, more imaginatively conceived, more vital, like the Nataraja and his dynamic dance, the frenzied Tandava, and the soft and subtle yet firmly conceived grace of the South Indian Parvatis and Sitas.

The Huna invasions dealt a death blow to the empire of the Imperial Guptas, which was already nearing its end, and by about A.D. 545 it

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vanished from the annals of history as a great power. The golden reign of the cultured Guptas could be said to have virtually come to an end with the death of Skandagupta in A.D. 467-468. The empire however continued in a greatly weakened form but the Gupta emperors exercised little power beyond Magadha and Bengal. It is now believed that the later Guptas of Malwa and Magadha, who ruled till the 8th century A.D., had absolutely no connection with the Imperial Guptas except for a similarity of name.

Pala and Sena dynasties

During the domination of the Palas professing Vajrayana Buddhism, and the succeeding Brahman-Kshatriya dynasty of the Senas from Karnataka, from about the 8th to the close of the 12th century A.D., another school of metal sculpture evolved and flourished in Bengal and Bihar. There came a revival of Buddhist influence, much admixtured with Brahmanical iconography, under the Palas, while the Senas revived Vedic Brahmanism from about the 11th century. The Gupta style seems to have considerably influenced the Pala school of sculptural art. The images of the region and the period have the Gupta grace and slender figuration, the attire even more diaphanous, though the body from the waist upwards is nearly always shown bare, except for elaborate and conventionalised jewellery and personal adornments. But unfortunately the simple and graceful style of the Guptas degenerated into highly stylised and stiffly formal attitudes. The humanity of the previous age also now diminished. The faces took on a certain sharpness, with aquiline noses, strongly defined lips and eyebrows, and half-closed brooding eyes. Often the figures were cast in groups, standing on a single base. However, the superb craftsmanship and imaginative flair of the Pala artists, even if slightly deficient in artistic inspiration, are amply demonstrated by the fine Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Taras of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, and the smaller museum at Nalanda. Unfortunately, the Pala bronzes of a later date tend to be rather mechanical in execution and lack the artistic flair of the early specimens. The two greatest artists of the Pala age were Dhiman and his son Bitpalo who lived in the reign of Devapala (9th century A.D.) and left behind them an unmistakable style of their own.

Kurkihar and Nalanda bronzes

Very similar to the Pala bronzes and most definitely influenced by the Pala school are those of Kurkihar in the Gaya district of Bihar. They have great elegance and a superficial charm about them and some of the choicest specimens can be seen today in the Patna Museum.

The large number of bronzes discovered at Nalanda and Kurkihar range from the pre-Gupta age to the 13th century A.D. The majority belong to the Pala period and as Karl Khandalavala so rightly points out, "... those in which the Gupta element is very pronounced are splendid specimens of plastic art, and go to show that a very vigorous school of metal images must have existed side by side with the stone-carvers during Gupta, post-Gupta and medieval times. Perhaps the two arts were practised by the same guild of workers or if by different guilds then clearly by metal imagers who were not primarily modellers but were greatly influenced

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by the plastic principles of the stone carver."[1] It is known for certain that both Dhiman and Bitpalo were workers in stone as well as in metal, and excelled in both arts. The stone images of the Palas, mostly in black slate, are polished to a high degree and shine almost with the sheen of metal. Naturally, the majority of the Nalanda and Kurkihar bronzes are images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist divinities as Buddhism continued to linger on in these eastern regions after it had almost died out elsewhere in the country.

Akota bronzes

Mention must also be made of the bronzes discovered fairly recently at Akota, a small village near Baroda; some of the finest specimens can be seen in the Baroda Museum and Art Gallery, of which a few are reproduced here with the kind permission of the Museum authorities.

The extant Akota images date from the 2nd to the 8th centuries A.D. and thus a few of them antedate the Gupta era, although the majority are typical of Gupta inspiration, and belong to the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. The Akota bronzes are very representative of the art traditions followed by the craftsmen in the western regions, especially in Gujarat, in the early medieval period. Perhaps this was the western school of metal art mentioned by Taranath, the Buddhist historian of the 17th century A.D. He has also referred to the flourishing Eastern school, perhaps that of Kurkihar, just as he has mentioned Dhiman and Bitpalo of the Pala 9th century.

Unfortunately, very little is known about the metal images of Akota, but the few plates reproduced in this work will convince the reader of their innate charm which is very individualistic in its simple dignity, so unlike the other schools of the post-Gupta age.

Gujarat and Rajasthan

In the later centuries—from the 14th to the 19th—many metal images were cast in Gujarat and Rajasthan, especially of Jain deities, Deepa-Lakshmis (see page 37), and Venugopalas—representations of Krishna as the divine flautist. Made mostly in brass, the images tend to be profusely ornamented with detailed jewellery, overshadowing clarity of line, and thus are devoid of true aesthetic merit. However, one does find a specimen now and then full of plastic beauty, in spite of the stylised formalism, the protruding eyes and projecting noses, so reminiscent of West Indian manuscript painting. However charming superficially, they invariably lack the inner spirituality of the Gupta bronzes or the dynamism of the Chola South. Yet, as Karl Khandalavala points out, ". . . the best examples have a fine sense of form whether it be the display of mass and volume or of curvilinear grace."[2]

Some interesting specimens of bronzes are also known from Sirpur and Khinkhini in the central region of India.

Nepal

During the regime of the Imperial Guptas, the art of metal casting reached the tiny mountain kingdom of Nepal, nestling among the snowy Himalayan peaks. Hence the early specimens of Nepalese metal sculpture are primarily in the Gupta idiom. It was however greatly influenced

[1] Karl Khandalavala, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*.
[2] Ibid.

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later by the art of the Palas, this influence superimposed by the native genius, the artistic inspiration and the religious beliefs of the Nepal artist-craftsman, evolving a distinct metal art of its own, with its own special characteristics. Here in this remote corner, uninfluenced by Islamic invasions, the art of metal imagery continued to flourish without interruption.

Nepalese metal art

Although a few known Nepalese specimens of metal sculpture are in bronze, the majority were—as they still are—in brass or made of beaten copper. Another unique feature of this school is the practice of gilding the base metal and encrusting the figures with rubies, lapis lazuli, turquoises, and other semi-precious stones—a trend that continues till this day. It is felt by some that to decorate metal icons with semi-precious stones is a form of artistic degeneration, a practice almost bordering on the "barbaric," and certainly in bad taste. That is how it may be. But we agree with Stella Kramrisch that "the mellow and deep glow of cabochon-cut spinel rubies, the blue freshness of turquoises, the light of rock crystal and the gleam of the pearl exceed in effect the inlaying of metal with metal, as of bronze with gold, silver, or copper, which are seen in Indian and Nepali metal images of the seventh century."[1] Thus the Nepali craftsman introduces colour in his productions, not by the use of pigments, but with glittering and colourful gems common in his country.

There is a roundness of contour, a soft and subtle rhythm of body lines, that is unique to Nepal's figure sculpture. The modelling is invariably rich, perhaps carried to an excess not quite desirable and the ornamentation is certainly excessive.

In the late 12th and early 13th centuries A.D. the influence of the Senas predominated. The modelling lost its early incisiveness and became shallow, the contours developing even greater softness and melodic smoothness than before. In the following century, the modelling of the flesh becomes even more definitive, and the soft parts of the body, like the abdomen, the thighs, and the shoulders, appear as if kneaded into shape like putty, imparting a feeling of resilience to the touch like living flesh. In the female figures of a still later date (15th century onwards), the waist is slim, the rounded, closely set breasts held high and sharply defined from the rest of the body. The face is round and rather broad, as if influenced by the Mongoloid features of the extreme north.

The Nepalese style of metal sculpture is rather differently summarised by Ananda Coomaraswamy:

"In the older Nepalese figures the Indian character is altogether predominant, and there is no suggestion whatever of anything Mongolian: they recall the work of the Gupta period. . . . They are characterized by a very full modelling of the flesh and almost florid features: the bridge of the nose is markedly rounded and the lips full. On the other hand, those of a later date, and up to modern times, are no longer robust and fleshy, but svelte and slender-waisted and more sharply contoured: the nose became aquiline, sometimes even hooked, the lips clear-cut and thin, and

[1] Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of Nepal.*

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the expression almost arch. . . . To sum up these distinctions, the art of the earlier figures is plastic and sculpturesque, while that of the latter has more the character of chasing and suggests the hand of the goldsmith rather than a modeller."[1]

Tara

A typical creation of the Nepal school is Tara, the mythological offspring—Shakti, according to some—of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and Mercy, arisen from the tears he shed at the unhappiness and misery prevalent in the world. She herself is the embodiment of pity, one "who is never called upon in vain."

The copper-gilt images of Nepal have, as said before, deservedly achieved a reputation for "beauty"; but in spite of their superficial "prettiness" they can never be placed on the same high plane of achievement as reached by the finest South Indian bronzes. Yet, it must be admitted that the best of the images of Tara, the ever-compassionate, have a delicacy and grace that is enchanting, however superficial they may be, and the decorativeness of the Nepal school distinguishes its work from that of any other region or period. As Karl Khandalavala so rightly says, ". . . . though they are not so vigorous nor so profoundly devout as the South Indian images, they have a charm all their own."[2] The plastic art of Nepal is not the sweeping art of the chiseller in stone, but rather the delicate art of the worker in precious metals, enhanced by the studding of ornaments, headdresses, the decorative waist-bands, etc., with semi-precious stones, just as the goldsmith-jeweller would do. "Flowing curves, gentle undulations, and a mastery of beautiful gestures of hands and fingers mark these productions. The compassionate expression of Tara Devi has usually more of graciousness in it than great spiritual depth."[3]

Elaborate and profusely ornamented lamps and censers for religious use are also commonly made even today.

Tibetan bronzes

From the tiny kingdom of Nepal, the art of metal sculpture travelled to Tibet, isolated from the world for centuries by the towering Himalayan ranges. Here a mixed style developed, the original Indian tradition subtly influenced by Chinese artistic ideals, the latter also in their turn having primarily been influenced and moulded by the northern Gupta school. This blend of the Indian and the Chinese is especially noticeable in the modelling of the drapery which is Indian in style, while the Mongolian cast of features proclaims the Chinese influence on the metal sculptor's art. On a comparative basis, "the Nepalese 'bronzes' are more Indian in character, and better executed and somewhat milder in the prevailing types, than those of Tibet."[4] The more vigorous and "barbaric" character of the Tibetan bronzes as compared to those from India or Nepal will be clearly apparent from a study of the specimens reproduced here.

If the Tibetan images depict more terrifying aspects of divinity, it

[1] *Rupam*, Vol. 2.
[2] Karl Khandalavala, op. cit.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ananda Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art.*

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must be remembered that the prevailing religion of the region is Lamaistic Buddhism that considers the original teachings of the Buddha—non-violence, humility, forbearance—as being ineffective in the present age when humility and goodness are mistaken for weakness. Violence can only be overcome by greater force by benign powers rather than by Ahimsa. Again, the Tibetan religion of pre-Buddhist days was permeated by a belief in evil spirits who had to be overcome, and such Shamanistic practices and beliefs became a part of the evolving Buddhist teachings. Hence, in Lamaism there evolved a number of half-Buddhist, half-Shamanistic images, for ever warring with the spirits of evil. And to overcome the powers of evil, the deities of goodness had to be even more fearsome, more terrifying, than even the evil spirits. This is further emphasised in the religious dances of the Lamas, in which the masks of the latter, representing the benign but powerful deities, are even more fearsome than those of the malign spirits ever at war with the former.

A comparison

A point worth noting is that unlike the South Indian images, which were always cast solid unless very large in size, the Nepalese-Tibetan icons are generally hollow-cast. This was probably due to the fact that the image-makers of the South were forbidden by tradition and religion to cast small figures hollow, without inviting the penalty of curses lasting for seven generations.

* * * *

Identification of images

It is not necessary to know the identity of an icon in order to understand its appeal and appreciate the true beauty of its workmanship. As a matter of fact, identification is not always easy or certain on account of the different texts followed by the Sthapatis and the iconographical differences found in them. However, from a study of the various texts, a common denominator can be deduced, at least in the case of the more common features of important divine representations. The serious reader may refer to T. A. Gopinatha Rao's *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, in four volumes, where the descriptive variations, as prescribed by different ancient writers, have been pointed out in great detail.

Aspects of the gods

Gods are depicted in four different modes: Yoga, depicting spirituality and inward realisation, the form preferred by ascetics and saints; Bhoga, expressing the enjoyment of worldly senses, and hence beloved of the masses in general; Vira, the heroic aspect, expressing valour and thus for kings and warriors; Abhicharika or the terrific form, appreciated most by those of evil intent.

Brahma

Metal images of the four-headed Brahma are not very common as the worship of the Creator has not been popular for a considerable time in spite of the fact that he is one of the foremost gods of the Brahmanic pantheon, the mythological framer of the universe and the Creator of all men. There are very few temples solely devoted to Brahma, although a stone image of this god is usually found in every large temple and certain prayers are offered to him daily by the attending priests. By the time metal

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icons became fairly common, he had already lost his importance as a cult-deity. However, some very fine metal images of Brahma can be seen in the Government Museum, Madras.

Brahma is always represented with four heads, each one dominating over a quarter of the universe. He lost his fifth top head when it was cut off by Shiva following a dispute—a myth with many variants. He may be depicted in the sitting or standing posture, bearing different expressions, and may even have his consorts with him. His chief attributes are the water vessel, the rosary, and a book or scroll symbolising perhaps the Vedas and signifying the god's wisdom and spiritual powers. He is the only important deity ever to be depicted with a small pointed beard. The swan (goose?) is his vehicle and even his consort Saraswati is also shown with it and the Veena, a popular Indian musical instrument, for in essence she is the goddess of music, learning, the arts, and the sciences.

Images of Vishnu

Vishnu is the legendary Preserver of the Hindu Trinity. His images may be in standing, sitting, or reclining modes—in the last case sleeping on the coils of the many-headed serpent Shesha or Ananta, "the Endless," symbolising infinity, floating on the primordial waters.

Although Vishnu is represented in all the Yoga, Bhoga, Vira, and Abhicharika forms, it is not always easy to distinguish them as the differences are slight. Vishnu is primarily a lovable god, kind and considerate for the well-being of mankind. A common form of Vishnu in stone sculpture is the reclining pose, the coils of Shesha forming a canopy over his head, his devoted consort at his feet. Thus he lies in inactivity till roused by dangers in the heavenly courts or worldly injustice to set right universal wrongs on earth or in the heavens. In the standing or sitting modes, Vishnu has four hands, the conch-shell (Sankha) and the whirling discus (Chakra) his two chief attributes.

Vishnu's vehicle or mount is the bird-man Garuda, a mythical creature half-man, half-bird, with powerful small wings and the lower half human. There are many forms in which Vishnu is shown, but these details are hardly material here.

Rama and Krishna

Vishnu may also be shown in one of his ten Avatars or incarnations, the two most popular in metal images being Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, and the flute-playing, fun-loving Krishna, adored by the Gopis (milk-maids) of Brindavan. The images of Krishna as a child, Bala-Krishna, are also common. But the most popular of Krishna metal images is that of Venugopala, Krishna with the flute, standing on a lotus plinth with his weight on the left leg, the right crossing over to lightly touch the base with the toes. The flute may be absent as it generally is in metal icons, but the hands and fingers are invariably posed as if he were about to play on it. The Venugopalas are the most gracious of Krishna representations, unusually appealing for the grace and plasticity of the figure and the charm and serenity of expression.

Shaivite images

The third and most important member of the Hindu Triad is Shiva, the Destroyer, to be ever propitiated by sacrifices, praises, and prayers.

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He is represented in all his manifold forms—standing, sitting, or dancing—in benign or terrific moods: Shiva—"Thou that dost take the forms imagined by thy worshippers."

Shiva is also found more often than other gods in compositional forms, mostly with his consorts and especially Parvati. Of course, the images of Shiva best known and certainly the most popular in metal are as Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance, stamping out ignorance and evil by the whirlwind motion of frenzy. It is the Nataraja figure that has made the South Indian bronzes famous and admired throughout the world and in the representation of which the Sthapatis of South India really excelled. Shiva's vehicle is the bull Nandi, frequently associated with him in stone sculpture, and always seen in Shaivite temples.

Ganesha

Among the Shaivite deities, mention may be made of the ever popular Ganesha or Ganpathy, the elephant-headed god, offspring of Shiva and Parvati. Many legends tell of his origin, some of them quite amusing. Although comparatively a minor deity, Ganesha—the God of Wisdom and the remover of obstacles—is widely worshipped by all Hindus and finds a place in every devout Hindu home, prayers being offered to him before any other god. He is certainly the easiest god to identify, whether standing, sitting, or dancing, on account of his elephant head, and is best known outside India of all the Hindu gods.

Subrahmanyam Karttikeya

Another son of Shiva is Karttikeya, most popular in the South as Subrahmanyam where his image is present in every South Indian hut and home. Known as Skanda in the northern regions of the country, he is the leader of the celestial hosts and the god of war. With two to twelve arms and six heads (as Subrahmanyam he may have only one head and four arms), he is invariably seen with his peacock mount. Some very fine bronzes of Subrahmanyam exist in the South

The consorts of the gods

In spite of some slight repetition, it is advisable to summarise at this place, after dealing with the most important male deities, the names and chief attributes of their divine consorts. No mention will however be made of the less important goddesses, of which there are many, as they are hardly ever represented in metal sculpture.

When a goddess is shown with her consort, she is given only two arms, one holding a flower and the other hanging limply by her side. She is always portrayed in combination as a pleasant, smiling, happy goddess, graced with feminine beauty, and adorned with personal ornaments. But when appearing in her own rights as Shakti, she may be depicted as benevolent, as fierce, or as ugly and destructive. She will have four or more hands carrying her attributes and the weapons usually associated with her consort.

Saraswati

As mentioned before, Saraswati, the consort of Brahma, is the goddess of the sciences and the arts, of poetry and music, wisdom and learning. The swan and the lotus are generally associated with her or she may be shown seated in Sukhasana on a lotus plinth. Her features are kind and graceful, for she is a benevolent deity. If the two front hands carry a Veena,

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the image is definitely that of Saraswati. The back hands may hold a scroll or book, a lotus, or the rosary. Her mount is the swan. A popular representation shows her standing in Samabhanga on an open lotus, with four hands carrying the usual attributes, fully ornamented but with decorations simpler than those of other goddesses. Bronze icons of Saraswati are rather rare, though she is often depicted in stone sculpture, either in the round or in bas-relief. Savitri is another consort of Brahma.

Lakshmi

Wealth and riches, material well-being and prosperity, are associated with Lakshmi or Sri in the Hindu mind. She emerged out of the waters during the churning of the ocean, full grown and radiant—one of the fourteen precious gifts—and was claimed by Vishnu as his own. Thereafter she was born as Vishnu's consort in each of his incarnations—as Kamala and Dharani, as the faithful Sita, as the milkmaid Radha or Krishna's temporal wife Rukmini.

The goddess of good fortune and the dispenser of wealth, Lakshmi is invariably represented as a beautiful young woman full of feminine graces. In composite images, she sits at Vishnu's feet as he lies immobile on the infinity of Ananta, or stands by his side with a lotus in her hands. In independent forms, she generally appears in Sukhasana with four arms, carrying the lotus or the discus and conch of Vishnu. Like Vishnu she may wear a long flower Vaijayantimala together with her other adornments. But Lakshmi is often represented with only two arms, perhaps to preserve her ideal of feminine beauty.

Devi

The consort of Shiva takes many forms for many are her manifestations. This "Goddess of a Thousand Names" is Mahadevi, "the Great Goddess"; Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas; the benevolent golden Uma. She is the malevolent Durga, forever fighting the enemies of the gods, the destructive Bhairavi, the fearful Bhavani or the dreaded black Kali, the devourer of time, the goddess of epidemics, with her small tusks and bleeding mouth. As Shakti, she is the Primordial Energy above even her Lord Shiva.

Parvati and Uma

The largest number of metal images are those of Parvati, often shown as slim and svelte womanhood. Any goddess shown in association with the lion must necessarily be Parvati or Durga though the lion is not often seen in metal sculpture. Parvati is the most important goddess in the divine hierarchy today.

As the benevolent Uma, she has four hands, two in the Abhaya and Varada Mudras, the other two holding other attributes. Generally shown in a standing Tribhanga pose, Parvati with two hands can be distinguished from the rather similar image of Lakshmi by the absence of the Kachabandha and the flower Vaijayantimala.

Parvati is often seen in combination with Shiva, standing or sitting by his side or embracing him. The commonest composite representation is the Kalyana-Sundara-murti, the marriage of Shiva and Parvati (see page 41).

Durga

Durga is also a manifestation of Devi. Stern and handsome, she appears with three eyes, wide hips, and muscular thighs. In her four hands

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she may hold the weapons of Shiva as well as the discus and conch-shell of Vishnu, for according to some legends she is also the sister of the latter god. It is as Durga that she is most commonly accompanied by the lion which may look sometimes like a tiger.

Kali

The fearful or Abhicharika aspect of Devi is Kali, worshipped by certain sects as Maha-Kali or Bhadra-Kali. She is given an awesome appearance, fearful and ugly, with small tusks emerging from the mouth, the latter dripping blood. Her hair are flames, enriched by a circlet of human skulls. Maha-Kali has four hands, but Bhadra-Kali is shown with twelve or more. Naked though ornamented with snakes and skulls and heads, two of her four arms are raised to bless her worshippers. Like Shiva, she too has three eyes, the third in the forehead. Metal images of Kali are not uncommon, her worship being fairly widespread in Bengal and other eastern regions of the country where there are several shrines especially dedicated to her.

* * * *

South Indian bronzes

There is no gainsaying the fact that the art and craft of metal sculpture and casting reached the acme of excellence in the South, and especially under the art loving Cholas. As Karl Khandalavala has said, "The best South Indian bronzes are amongst the finest achievement of metal sculpture in the world."

At first, the earliest metal art of the South closely resembled the stone sculpture of the region. It exhibited all the rigidity and static qualities imposed on the sculptor by the unyielding nature of stone, laboriously wrought into shape with the chisel and the hammer, in contrast to the greater plastic possibilities available to the modeller—for the image-maker is primarily one, first creating his image in wax. Thus, the bronze figures of the early period were like stone reliefs and lacked the freedom of expression and the full rotundity of later times; but with greater experience must have come better skills in the modelling of the soft plastic material and the casting techniques as well. As Karl Khandalavala points out, "Though these South Indian bronzes display the same plastic principles to which the Indian stone sculptor was so alive, they also brought into the inflexions of the body, and to the varied beautiful gestures of the hands and fingers, a rhythm and movement too delicate and subtle to be captured by the medium of stone. In the finest examples of female figures they achieved a subtle curvilinear grace which was detached from the sensuousness of the stone figures of Mathura or those of the mediaeval temples of Orissa and Khajuraho. In the male types they achieved uprightness and dignity of form and supple clean strength pervaded by an atmosphere of great spirituality."[1]

Rise of Brahmanism

It has been truly said that Indian metal sculpture in the southern part of the country emphasised the last, though the finest, chapter in the art of Dravidian India. During the ascendancy of the Shaivite faith in the

[1] Karl Khandalavala, op. cit.

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South by the 8th century A.D., bands of holy men, proselytes of Brahmanical Hinduism, wandered through the country preaching their faith and singing the praises of Lord Shiva, at once the great Creator and the Ultimate Destroyer, for creation can only come from destruction. "In the absorbing serenity of expression, in the rhythmic sways and dynamic symmetry of the poses, above all in the moving and generalised forms of an original yet artistic anatomy, the bronzes of this school translate the abstruse conceptions of Brahmanic philosophy, into which the artists have skilfully mingled their own meditations, their prayers and all the hope of their lives," O. C. Gangoly eloquently remarks. So successful was the mission of the Shaivite preachers that as years rolled by, Buddhist and Jain influences waned steadily, till by about A.D. 1000, all traces of such influences had died out in the South.

Image types

To quote Karl Khandalavala again: "These South Indian bronzes are mainly Shivite in character because in the 6th and 7th centuries fervent hymnists and evangelists like Manika Vasagar, Apparaswami, Sundaramurtiswami, and others, had been instrumental in arousing a wave of religious fervour extolling the cult of Shiva all over the Southern homeland. Their object was to destroy the supremacy of the hold which Buddhism and Jainism then had over the peoples of the South. As a matter of fact, some of the noblest and most devoutly conceived of these Chola and post-Chola images are those of these poet-gospellers themselves."[1]

However, there also exists in the South a large number of Vaishnavite images, such as those of Krishna, Rama, Vishnu, etc., the best of which can compete in beauty and merit with the finest of the Shaivite bronzes. Images of Sita, Rama's devoted spouse who shared with him his long exile in the forest, are also common, figuring her with all the slim grace and charms of womanhood.

As already said, the images were cast in copper, bronze with a large copper content, or in brass, by the *cire perdue* technique, the Sthapatis following the canons of measurement and the codified postures as dictated in the ancient texts. A static frontal pose was favoured for divinities in aspects of spiritual serenity; but more varied postures with body bends were employed when the moods personified cosmic functions and dynamic expressions. The beauty and the grace of posture of the South Indian Parvatis and Sitas are undeniable.

The periods

The art of metal sculpture in South India may be roughly divided into the following periods:

Andhra and Chalukya period
Pallava period
Early Chola period
Late Chola period
Hoysala and Yadava period
Vijayanagar period
Post-Vijayanagar period

[1] Karl Khandalavala, ibid.

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Andhra and Chalukya period

The Andhra and early Chalukya period ended round about A.D. 642. Very few bronzes from this time are known to us. The few that are extant show the characteristics of the stone sculpture of the period, especially the sculptures of Sanchi and Amaravati in the case of the Andhra images. However, the sculpture of the early Chalukyas, mostly in stone, shows a definite Gupta influence, though such influence has been lately denied by some authorities.

Pallava and Chola images

The Pallava icons mark a definite advance. But the real art of metal sculpture may be said to have really begun with the Cholas in the 10th century A.D. This is a period not only of excellence of workmanship and creativity, but also of profusion, and a large number of bronzes of the period are housed in important museums throughout the world and in private collections. Representations of Shiva are the most numerous, especially as Nataraja, as also are those of his consort Parvati and of Skanda, their warrior offspring. Known also are "portraits" of Chola kings and queens, of Shaivite and Vaishnavite saints and disciples. Many of these "portrait" sculptures bear the names of the persons portrayed, although perhaps the resemblance is not quite factual in the representational sense.

The images of the Pallava period bear faces that are rather elongated, with wide noses projecting only slightly, full and thick lips, drooping eyelids, and often the suggestion of a double chin. In contrast, the Chola images are more refined, with a rotundity and "fleshiness" of the body more alike nature. Yet the body is slender, with broad shoulders and narrow waists. They express greater vitality in spite of conventional codified attitudes and gestures than the figures of the earlier period. The necklaces are now arranged circularly round the neck and do not hang down between the breasts, nor are they too large and heavy or unduly ornate. Most of the images are depicted with an armlet above the elbow and a girdle round the waist, both modelled realistically. Strangely enough, the figures of the late Chola period exhibit more conventionalism and rigidity, whether shown standing or sitting, although they retain their earlier grace to a considerable degree. In the Chola period, the nose is featured more prominently than by the Pallava image-makers and the body appears as if more solidly constructed, emanating a greater sense of vigour and physical strength.

The characteristics of the bronzes of the different periods have been summarised in tabular form on page 40.

The Yadavas and Hoysalas

The Yadavas were at first suzerains of a score of petty vassal kingdoms till they fell heir to the northern possessions of the Chalukyas. A little later came the Hoysalas, in the beginning a minor dynasty, ruling from Dvarasamudra, the modern Halebid in Mysore State. The art of the Hoysalas tends to be florid and highly decorative, like their stone sculpture, exhibiting greater technical virtuosity rather than artistic flair, an art very unlike the chaste Chola style.

Vijayanagar period

The later Chalukya and Chola metal art existed side by side for a long time though independently, to finally merge in the art of Vijayanagar of

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the 14th to the 16th centuries A.D. The art of this school continued for a fairly long period after the sack of Vijayanagar itself, the City of Victory, by the Islamic armies in A.D. 1565. Once again a different style of sculpture came into existence, but unlike the art of the Cholas, accompanied unfortunately by poor modelling and formalised unnaturalistic attitudes. This formality and conventionality of the figures, rather elaborate, contrived, and laboured, is most apparent in the drapery, often over-decorated with jewellery. The faces, oval and stiffly smiling, are now beginning to lose expression, with their widely staring eyes. The nose is sharp and prominent, and a vertical cleft appears in the chin. The body is slim but angular, ridges separating the chest and the abdomen. The navel is often depicted with lines surrounding it in the form of rays emanating from the centre, all characteristic of the period and sure guides to period identification (see Table on page 40). The true art of metal sculpture was now ebbing fast.

Post-Vijayanagar period

With the post-Vijayanagar age came definite decadence of the art and utter poverty of the creative urge. The images are now devoid of all life and vigour, the body stiff and artificial with exaggerated bends, the faces with a grimacing smile. Even the craftsmanship has now deteriorated. We have reached the stage of artistic barrenness, a stilted formalism, crude workmanship—the style that has come down to us today, for the 18th century saw the slow decline and death of a once truly great art. Nothing of any consequence has been produced from this century onwards. The former vitality and vigour have died out. Made in large numbers, the images of the 18th century till this day are poor specimens of a decadent style, a hollow mockery of the great traditions of the past, the one-time skill and aesthetic vigour of the image-makers of old. It seems as if today they are no longer inspired but are just the uninterested producers of what is demanded of them. The Sthapatis are now no more creative artists but mere artisans. The once great art of metal sculpture and casting in India is dead.

* * * *

Images of Shaivite saints

Apart from the images of Shiva and Parvati, Vishnu and Krishna, South Indian bronzes also abound in representations of Shaivite saints, especially Sundaramurtiswami who was claimed by Shiva as his disciple on the former's wedding day. The best of these are very representative of traditional elements invested with an attenuation of the figure. Describing such images, Benjamin Rowland speaks of "the exquisite gestures of the hands," "the moving line of the silhouette" of the body, "the exaggerations of features and proportions, such as the lotiform eyes and leonine torso."[1]

The best representations of the Shaivite saints however exhibit a rare quality of exaltation and devotion, the fervent rapture of a devoted disciple for his divine master, seemingly vibrating in tune with the com-

[1] Benjamin Rowland, op. cit.

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municating aura emanating from the Supreme Omniscience. By no means are these images "portraits" in any sense of the word. They only represent an idealised union of attributes, personifications of the quality of exalted devotion, allied to a name.

The Nataraja

The most dramatically conceived of the South Indian bronzes are undeniably representations of the Nataraja—Shiva as the Lord of the Dance—either in his playful or destructive aspect, creating and destroying through aeons of time. He is the Divine Dancer, personified in terms of motion and vibration, who in 108 varied dance movements interprets the mathematical law of the universe. "Our Lord is the dancer, who, like the heat latent in wood for kindling fire, diffuses his power through both spirit and matter, and causes them each in turn to dance." Thus speaks an ancient text. In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy: "The Indian Nataraja may well be claimed as the clearest, most logical, and impassioned statement of the conception of life as an Eternal Becoming."

The Nataraja typifies the universe in the process of creation and destruction. "This is his dance in the last night of the world when the stars fall from their courses and all is reduced to ashes, to be ever rekindled, ever renewed by the boundless power of the Lord. . . .The dionysian frenzy of the whirling dance presents affirmation of the eternal, unseen spectacle of the dynamic disintegration and renewal, birth and death, of all cosmic matter in every second as in every kalpa of time. . . ."[1] Such is the Nadanta dance.[2]

Dance of Shiva

The dance of Shiva, to the Dravidian mind, is a personification of the cosmic forces of Nature, the pulsation of energy within the universe, the eternal dance of the whirling electrons in their orbits in the atoms of apparently unmoving matter. In the whirlwind dance, Shiva personifies the kinetic aspect of his divinity, the elemental force through which the universe is created, sustained, and ultimately destroyed—for its re-creation in a later Kalpa of time, a Day or Night of Brahma. He is the static though vibrant centre round which the forces of the cosmos whirl and revolve. As says Havell, he is the Supreme Intelligence, the Divine Spirit, dancing the dance of Karma. "They never see rebirths who behold this mystic Dance." "Thus the god appears as the very essence of vital ordered movement, eternal youth, and ethereal light," writes A. L. Basham eloquently. "This is not the European conception of the highest godhead, but once the religious background is understood, even a European can recognize in the finest specimens of the dancing Shiva a true religious inspiration, a wholly successful effort at depicting in plastic terms divine truth, beauty and joy."[3]

Metaphysics of Shiva's dance

In the metaphysical terms of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Nature is still and inactive in the silent Night of Brahma, and cannot wake till Shiva wills it. Bestirring Himself from his inactivity, dancing, he sends through the universal ether, the pulsing rhythm of sound and movement—the

[1] Benjamin Rowland, op. cit.

[2] In the Nadanta, the deity stands on his left leg, with the right raised. Otherwise, Shiva Nataraja is shown standing on the right leg, with the other uplifted slightly.

[3] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that Was India.*

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beat of the Damaru drum—till all Nature dances in its reawakening. Then He destroys all forms, all life, and a new Rest settles over all. The movement of the atoms, the dance of the cosmic spheres, evolution and rest, alternate through widening universal space and the boundless tracts of time.

"In thy dance, Divine Dancer, freedom finds
its image and dreams their forms.
Its cadence weaves the threads of things and
unwinds them for ages;

* * *

And churns up existence into surging
joys and sorrows."

—Rabindranath Tagore

Shiva and the Rishis

But such a mystic and metaphysical conception of the Eternal Dance, the dance of Divine Ecstasy, could hardly be comprehended by the average mind and thus evolved a popular explanation of the Dancing Shiva. Disguised as a simple ascetic, once Shiva wandered into a hermitage deep in the dark forest of Taragram, where certain heretical Rishis (sages) had assembled. Confronted with their arguments and polemics, Shiva confuted them all. Angered by their defeat, they tried to destroy Shiva by their knowledge of black magic. They created at first a fierce tiger that sprang up from the sacrificial fire. The great god calmly stripped it of its skin and nails and wrapped the skin round himself. Next arose a venomous serpent. Taking it in His bare hands and twisting it like a garland round his neck, Shiva began his frenzied dance. But the Rishis were not yet done. An ugly dwarf demon, Mulayaka or Apasamara-Purusha, evolved from the sacrificial fire, only to be crushed under Shiva's trampling feet. . . And all the time, the triumphant whirlwind of the dance, as the assembled Rishis and the Devas (gods) on high watched in awe and fear.

The Nadanta was supposed to have been performed first before the gods and Rishis in the golden assembly hall of Chidambaram, the god's southern home. It was revealed after the heretical sages had submitted to Him in the forest of Taragram, the legend as related in the *Koyil Puranam.* Metaphysically, the central theme of the dance is cosmic activity. In the Nataraja images, according to Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Creation arises from the drum: protection proceeds from the hand of hope: from fire proceeds destruction: the foot held aloft gives release. . . . The fourth hand points to this lifted foot, the refuge of the Soul."

Ananda Coomaraswamy believes that Shiva's cosmic dance has "a dual significance. On the one hand it represents the material processes of Nature; on the other, the subjective spiritual processes by which worldly passions, evil thinking and wickedness are destroyed or transmuted in the alembic of the Divine Alchemist."[1]

[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva.*

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Listen to the *Chidambara Mummai Kovai:*

"Oh Lord of the Dance, who calls by beat of drum all those who are absorbed in worldly things, and dispels the fear of the humble and comforts them with His love Divine: who points with his uplifted Lotus foot as the refuge of Salvation; who carries the fire of sacrifice and dances in the Hall of the Universe, do Thou protect us!"

And again:

"Oh, my Lord, Thy hand holding the sacred drum hath made and ordered the heavens and earth and other worlds and souls innumerable. Thy uplifted hand protects the multifarious animate and inanimate extended universe. Thy sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives abode to the tired and struggling in the toils of Karma. It is Thy uplifted foot that grants eternal bliss to those that approach Thee!"[1]

The symbolism

Taking a representative example, like the justly famous Nataraja of the Government Museum, Madras (Plate 78), belonging to the Chola period, the symbolism can be explained on the basis of the existing Sanskrit ritualistic texts, as done by Havell. The Damaru drum, held in the upper right hand "beats out the cosmic rhythm-sound representing the primary creative force and the intervals of the beat of the time-process." One left hand holds the sacrificial fire, the fire of universal destruction. The other left arm is stretched across the body and points to the uplifted foot—"the refuge of salvation." The lower right arm, round which a cobra is twined, is raised high, assuring all devotees of divine protection. The Torana or arch of flames surrounding the composition, not always present in all Nataraja images, is the Hall of the Universe pulsating with the frenzy of Shiva's eternal dance. Under Shiva's foot lies the dwarf demon of Ignorance, "the dark cloud of materialism in the Eternal Ether, which disappears in the sunshine of the Divine Spirit." In the dancing Shiva is energy personified, all the passion and force of cadenced movement. Often enclosed in a circlet of flames, the Lord of the Dance vanquishes the demon of Illusion and Ignorance crushed under one foot, the other swinging to the rhythm of the cosmic dance. Thus, according to Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Nadanta symbolises Shiva's Five Activities (Panchakritya): evolution and creation (Shrishti); preservation (Sthiti); destruction and evolution (Samhara); illusion, veiling, embodiment, and the conferring of rest (Tirobhava); grace, release, salvation (Anugraha).

Yet, not all representations of Nataraja show the violence and frenzy of the eternal dance of destruction and creation. For example, in the superb figure preserved in the Museum in Colombo,[2] found in a temple at Polonnaruwa but definitely of South Indian workmanship of the 11th century, there is a feeling of slow and perfect rhythm, a controlled movement, a perfect fusion of balance, equanimity, and serene repose. Yet, strangely enough the image embodies all the visual power of a figure in motion, emphasised by the peculiar arrangement of the multiple arms and the

[1] Quoted by O. C. Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes.*

[2] Benjamin Rowland, op. cit., Pl. 128B.

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torsion imparted to the dancing figure, further stressed by the varied directions of the lower limbs.

"It is not strange that the figure of Nataraja has commanded the adoration of so many generations past: familiar with all scepticisms, expert in tracing all beliefs to primitive superstitions, explorers of the infinitely great and infinitely small, we are worshippers of Nataraja still."[1]

The Tandava

The Tandava is another of Shiva's dances in his ferocious or Tamasik aspect as Bhairava. This multi-armed frenzied dance is also symbolic of the god's cosmic function of creation and destruction of the world at the beginning and end of every Kalpa of time, annihilation and re-integration into the universal spirit, the destruction of the world of illusion and ignorance and its creation afresh. This is the dance of the cemetery and the burning grounds, ghoulish and grim, but bringing even the unclean within the scope of His spiritual powers. The Tandava is not commonly represented in metal images, but is frequently delineated in stone, as at Ellora, Elephanta, and many other places. In this representation, Shiva is generally given ten hands, carrying various weapons and attributes.

Parvati

The Shakti or Female Energy of Shiva as Durga, Kali, etc., or as his devoted consort in her various iconographical forms as Parvati, Uma, or Gauri, find frequent representation in South Indian bronzes. With firm breasts, a slim waist, and a svelte figure, imbued with a languid grace, in the images of Parvati is a fusion of divinity with the charms of earthly feminity.

The Chola Parvati is invariably slim and graceful, usually with the alluring triple body flexions. Perhaps one of the finest images is the Parvati of the Freer Art Gallery in Washington, dating from the 11th or 12th century A.D.[2] Although rather attenuated in form, a sense of dynamism and sensitiveness pervades the image, reminiscent of the tree-goddesses of Sanchi. The rather unnatural elongation of the figure—it is nine Talas in height—gives it a sense of sophisticated grace and aristocratic bearing. The breasts are moulded round and smooth, like the "golden urns" of the poets of classical Sanskrit literature.

Kali

Images of Parvati were produced in some profusion during Chola times. But delineations of Kali, the demoniac aspect of Shiva's Shakti—represented as the goddess of evil and destruction, of diseases, epidemics, and death—are also known. She is generally shown as an emaciated figure, and if dancing, holding the cymbals that clash in harsh cadence in accompaniment to her Dance of Death.

Kali is chiefly worshipped by the Shaktas, devotees of the Female Energy, a sect whose worship today is infested with undesirable and even obscene rites and rituals. Thus runs one of their hymns: "Because thou dost love the funeral pyres, I have made a pyre of my heart, that thou mayst come, O gloomy goddess, and dance in it thine eternal dance. Enter into me, enter into me, dancing thy rhythmic dance, that I may gaze upon thee with closed eyes."[3]

[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva.*
[2] Benjamin Rowland, op. cit., Pl. 127b.
[3] Quoted by René Grousset.

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"Portraits"

The Cholas represented their gods and goddesses not as idealised personifications, but as a synthesis of attributes. But "portrait" metal sculptures were also made of important men and women, of the founders of temples and the donors of rich gifts. Specimens of actual delineations—we do not know how true to life—become more frequent with the rise of the Cholas in the 10th century A.D. To name a few of the more important "portrait" images, mention may be made of the one in the Shiva temple at Konerirajapuram (10th century A.D.), which probably is a living likeness of Sembiyan-ma-devi, the queen who founded the temple. In the Brihadeshwara temple in Thanjavur (Tanjore) stands a statue bearing a label identifying it with Rajarajendra-Chola-raja, probably the Chola king Rajaraja I. Shown standing, it is poor in workmanship, but it clearly seems to be a definite attempt at a likeness of a living being. A much superior example is the image of Vishnuvardhana in the Kesava temple at Belur, the king who was converted to Vaishnavism by Ramanuja and later became famous for the magnificent temples he had had constructed.

Change in technique

With the 15th century A.D., a change in methods and techniques becomes apparent. One of the finest examples of the period is the composition in copper in the Sri Nivasa Perumal temple on Tirumalai hill, near Tirupatti, of the famous Vijayanagar king Krishna-deva-raya (A.D. 1509-29) with his queens, Chinna-devi and Tirumala-devi on either side of him.[1] The identity of the figures is beyond doubt on account of the incised lettering on the shoulders of the statues. They are beautifully made in copper repoussé work, excellent both in their craftsmanship and artistry considering the age in which they were cast. The figures are in two hollow sections, front and rear, and joined together with rivets to give them the appearance of solidity. The figure of the king is nearly 1.2 metres high; that of his queens, proportionately smaller. In this, the artist has probably bowed to ancient Indian artistic tradition that demanded that the minor personalities should be of smaller size than the chief figure, just as the goddesses are cast on a smaller scale compared to the gods according to the Tala measure.

Deepams

Perhaps some of the finest examples of South Indian metal art are the elaborate censers and votive lamps made for ceremonial use in temples or at home. These Deepams or Deepas are in the form of branching trees, animal or human figures, or in other shapes, with a receptacle or receptacles for the oil and the wick; often the donor of the gift is suggested by the figure if the Deepam is designed in human form. When the lamp is in the shape of a human female, it is known as a Deepa-Lakshmi. These Deepa-Lakshmis are very characteristic of Chola art of the later period and they inspired the South Indian Sthapatis to produce some of their finest and most inventive work. Infinitely varied in shape and size, generally cast in copper or brass, they range from about a few to several kilograms in weight, depending on their destined use, whether in a temple or in the home. Most of them are superb specimens of craftsmanship. Though cast by the

[1] Vincent Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, third edition, Pl. 140B.

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Sthapatis according to the guiding injunctions of the Shastras, they show no stereotype uniformity, but on the contrary testify to the imaginative genius of the craftsmen who produced them, although bound by ancient traditions to conform to the innate symbolism of the wares they produced.

The Deepams or votive lamps form a very essential part of temple ritual and were often presented by grateful worshippers as a token of their burning devotion to the deity enshrined within the precincts of the temple. Such donated lamps thus came to be called Deva-danams (Gifts to Gods).

V. M. Narasimhan tells us: "Peculiar, protective value was also attached to these votive lamps. If in the time of Kulotunga Chola III (A.D. 1178-1215) an accidental homicide was committed at a deer hunt the person responsible was asked to atone for the sin by endowing a perpetually burning lamp in a temple for the benefit of the homicide"[1] in order to escape the wrath of the victim's soul.

The importance of these votive lamps is emphasised by the fact that one full chapter is devoted in the *Shilpa Shastra* to their desired characteristics, their classification, and the mode of production. The ancient Vedic texts also prescribe that these Deepas should have pedestals for "Mother Earth is accustomed to undergo all sorts of sufferings, but she will not put up with the heat of lamps." When made without a pedestal, the lamps are hung from the ceiling by means of chains, often masterpieces of craftsmanship in themselves. The most popular are of course the Deepa-Lakshmis, the lamps in the form of female figures holding a bowl in the hands for the oil and the wick, and excellent examples of these can be seen today in many a temple in the South.

"As a symbol of Surya and Agni the lamp has always been deemed auspicious," says S. G. Kelkar. "It was dutifully and religiously offered to Him who bestowed it upon mankind. The lamp was indispensable for prayer. It was a sacred token of devotion, supplication and benediction. The gods were believed to dwell by the light of the holy lamp. Its very existence helped man to shed the fear of the dark. To man, light was knowledge."[2]

Once having come to believe in the sanctity of the ritual lamp, the next step naturally was to invest it with grace and adorn it with beauty.

* * * *

Superb certainly has been India's art of metal sculpture. As Benjamin Rowland has so rightly pointed out, the figure bronzes of India symbolise the Indian ideals, especially in their absolute rather than human beauty and the almost geometric purity and simplicity of the lines. The images may be cast in a human mould, but theirs is really the perfection of a pure mathematical formula, almost the chaste dignity of a geometrical design. The image of a divinity is only a hypostasis of godhead, a revealing outline of his essence. The physical delineation as prescribed by the Shastras, the

[1] *Marg*, IV, 3.
[2] S. G. Kelkar, *Lamps of India.*

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postures, Mudras, the Vahanas and the weapons, the symbolic emblems, and all the manifold characteristics of each and every aspect of a god or goddess, are related to a mental quality, impersonal emotion, or inner consciousness of the deity represented. Therein lies the uniqueness of Indian plastic art, distinguishing it from all others, dictated as it is by that "divinity which has seized the soul."

The metal images, and even stone figure sculpture, are evocations symbolised rather than lyrical descriptions of a divinity worshipped by the common man, ever present not only in his mind but also always in his heart. The art of the South Indian Sthapati, the artist and craftsman in copper, brass, or bronze, is a language that is world-wide, of all time, one that can be appercepted by all and touch the soul of every human being—every one imbued with aesthetic discernment and in whom flows the stream of religious or spiritual fervour.

It is true that the creation and interpretation of a work of art depend primarily on a nation's rituals, beliefs, and culture. But there can be no doubt of the universal appeal that lies buried in the silent beauty and craftsmanship of the best of Indian bronzes as the Plates that follow will unfold.

PERIOD CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH INDIAN BRONZES

	PALLAVA	EARLY CHOLA	LATE CHOLA	VIJAYANAGAR	POST-VIJAYANAGAR
	7th-8th century	*9th-14th centuries*		*14th-16th centuries*	*17th century*
BODY CHARACTERISTICS	Plastic. Thick-set. Brooding elongated face. Thick and full lips. Drooping eyelids. Chin prominent. Wide nose hardly projecting. Chest softly modelled to merge gently into abdomen.	Expression gentle and pleasing. Nose more prominent. Eyes naturalistic. Face round. Lower lip thick. Body quite slender with broad shoulders and slim waist.	Figure more conventional and stiffer than before, yet still pleasing and graceful. Knee caps quite prominent.	Body conventionalised, angular, slim. The abdomen sharply differentiated from chest with 2 or 3 ridges across former. Lines radiating from the navel. Faces oval and smiling with vertical cleft in chin. Slanting eyes wide open, almost staring. Long neck. Slim waist. Wide hips. Faces without much expression.	Body artificial and stiff or with exaggerated curves. Faces almost triangular. Sharp prominent nose. Smile artificial and grimacing. Well modelled finger tips and nails but hand gestures crude.
HEADGEAR AND HAIR STYLES	Simple.	More elaborate than of Pallava period yet not too heavy or ornate. Each god with his distinctive Mukuta or hair style. Hair often brushed back and curled at the back.			
ORNAMENTATION AND JEWELLERY	Simple. Only 2 or 3 necklaces, massive and often with pendants. Earrings small and plain. 1 or 2 plain bands as bracelets. Small button-like projection on topmost armlet above elbow. Often bows on either side of girdle.	More ornaments on arms, wrists and ankles. Jewellery in high relief. Heavy, short and round necklaces. Girdle simple and often chained. Fan-shaped projection on lowermost armlet above elbow in 2-armed figures. Replaced by a knob in 4-armed figures.	Jewellery more abundant but delicate. Necklaces longer but not falling over chest or between breasts. Necklace often with mango-shaped ornaments. Earrings long and falling on neck. Girdle with tassels, festoons, etc.	Abundant, highly decorative jewellery. Necklaces long and falling on chest. Girdle elaborate with festoons hanging down sides of legs. In Nataraja figures, a loop on right of girdle.	Jewellery elaborate and with fancy designs, heavy and artificial looking.
ACCESSORIES	Emblems in hands simple and realistic. Vishnu's discus facing inwards and held between thumb and index finger. Shiva's axe with long handle and held in the fist. Plinth low and simple.	Vishnu's discus with more flame-like projections than before and held between the index and middle fingers. Shiva's battle-axe held between two fingers. Handle quite long.		Emblems highly ornamented and unrealistic in shape. Vishnu's discus decorated with flames and bows, held facing outwards. Shiva's axe with short handle like a club and decorated with flames and tassels.	
DRAPERY	Middle loop of girdle often hangs between legs with often an oblique twist. Sacred thread may fall over right forearm after passing across the chest.	Drapery graceful, clinging close to the body. Dhoti or lower garment quite often with a wheel design.		Drapery elaborately formal and conventionalised.	

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SPECIAL FORMS OF DIVINITIES

The following brief descriptions are necessary for an understanding of the special forms of deities illustrated here. These manifestations are often to be seen in Indian metal sculpture. There are of course many other forms not dealt with here as they have not been shown in our Plates.

ARDHANARISVARA-MURTI

This is the combined form of standing Shiva, the right half male and the other female (Shakti). This representation, with many legends for its creation, was perhaps an attempt to co-ordinate the early worship of the mother-goddess with that of Shiva. This is a popular form of Shiva and Shakti and is often seen in bronzes.

HAYAGRIVA

The half horse, half man form of Vishnu which he took in order to destroy a Rakshasha (an enemy of the gods and men). In this form he is often looked upon as a god of learning, his functions and attributes being similar to those of Saraswati, traditionally the goddess of learning, wisdom, music, the sciences, and the fine arts. The Hayagriva image should not be confused with that of Kalki, Vishnu's last Avatar still to come, and in which also he is represented with the head of a horse. For while as Hayagriva he has four hands, Kalki has only two.

KALYANA-SUNDARA-MURTI OF SHIVA

This is a double composition with Shiva taking the hand of Parvati in marriage, both figures standing. Parvati is generally on the right, but may be on the left occasionally as Shiva holds her hand. Both deities are depicted with all their ornaments and symbols as prescribed by the ancient texts. In some compositions (Plate 65) Vishnu may also be shown giving away the bride.

KANKALA-MURTI OF SHIVA

During an argument with Brahma as to the supremacy of each in the universe, Shiva cut off the fifth head of Brahma in a rage. For this heinous crime, for Brahma is considered a Brahman, the Creator condemned him to beg for his food in the streets of heaven, with the skull he had chopped off as his begging bowl. In such representations, Shiva is depicted as a wandering mendicant. He carries a small drum and a stick to beat it with in the front two hands. This representation is not common in metal though widespread in stone sculpture.

BHIKSHATANA-MURTI OF SHIVA

This is rather like the above, but here Shiva carries the drum in one of the upper hands and the skull begging bowl in a lower hand. Shiva is unadorned in this form, often

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without clothes and wearing a garland of skulls and with a serpent round his waist. This representation is common both in metal and stone images.

SOMASKANDA-MURTI

Here Shiva and Devi are shown sitting together on one plinth, with their offspring Skanda standing between them, generally holding flowers in both hands.

TRIPURANTAKA-MURTI OF SHIVA

In this representation Shiva is shown in one of his terrific aspects fighting the Asuras, the traditional enemies of the gods. The hands are posed in the gesture of holding bow and arrow, though these are not represented in metal images and neither are the Asuras. The image is distinguished from Vinadhara-Dakshina-murti (see below) by the absence of the demon under Shiva's feet. The whole composition is necessarily greatly simplified in metal images though sculptures in stone may be very much more detailed.

UMA-MAHESVARA-MURTI

In this composition, Shiva sits in Sukhasana, with Devi seated on his left thigh, her legs hanging straight down. This is a popular version of Shiva and Devi. The former may have two or four hands, one arm always embracing his consort who may be shown holding a flower in her left hand, her right hand round the god's waist. This benign form of Shiva and Devi is worshipped by husband and wife together and is commonly seen in both metal and stone sculpture.

VINADHARA-DAKSHINA-MURTI

Here Shiva is shown as a great teacher of music, with a Veena resting on the right thigh in sitting images or held in the front two hands if in the standing mode. The back hands hold the usual emblems. Often the Veena may be missing from the composition.

VISHAPRAHANA-MURTI OF SHIVA

In these images Shiva is depicted as drinking up the poison that floated to the surface during the churning of the milk ocean by the gods and the Asuras, a common theme in Hindu mythology, in order to save all from its deadly effects.

VRISHAVAHANA-MURTI OF SHIVA

Shiva is here represented with his hand seemingly resting on the non-existing Nandi, his vehicle. He may be shown with two or four arms. In stone sculpture in which this representation is very common, Shiva may even be shown riding on Nandi; but Vrisha-Vahana-murtis are not common in metal form.

KALIYAMARDAKA KRISHNA

Krishna killing the serpent Kaliya. Generally depicted as boy-Krishna dancing on the hood of the serpent (sometimes on the body), holding the outstretched tail in the left hand as the left leg stamps on the serpent, the right leg raised.

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THE PLATES

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Pl. 1. Bull. From Mohenjo-Daro, Sind. 3rd millennium B.C. Copper. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 2. Dancing girl. From Mohenjo-Daro, Sind. 3rd millennium B.C. Bronze. Height, 10 cms. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 3. Back view of Plate 2.

Pl. 4. The Boy Harpocrates. From Sirkap, Taxila. 1st century B.C. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 5. Standing Buddha. From Sultanganj, Bihar. Gupta period. Early 5th century A.D. Copper. Height, 225 cms. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. (Photo, Archaeological Survey of India).

Pl. 6. The Buddha in Bhumisparsa Mudra. From Nalanda, Bihar. Pala period. Bronze.

Pl .7. A Buddhist Tantric Deity. Pala period. Bronze. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 8. Bodhisattva Padmapani, "The Lotus-bearer." From Nalanda, Bihar. Pala period. C. 8th-9th century A.D. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 9. Standing Buddha in Abhaya Mudra. From Nalanda, Bihar. Pala period. C. 9th century A.D. Bronze. Height, about 35 cms. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 10. Nativity of the Buddha. From Nalanda, Bihar. Pala period, C. 10th century A.D. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 11. Arapacana, a popular aspect of Bodhisattva Manjusari. From Nalanda, Bihar. Pala period. C. 10th century A.D. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 12. Vishnu. From Sagardighi, Bengal. Pala period. C. 11th century A.D. Bronze. Courtesy, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 13. Vishnu with his consorts Sri Devi and Bhu Devi. From Rangpur, Sena period. 12th century A.D. Bronze. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 14. Hrishikhesa form of Vishnu seated in Maharajalilasana. From Sagardighi, Bengal. Sena period. 12th century A.D. Bronze. Courtesy, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 15. Many-armed Mahakala in the terrific aspect. Bronze. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 16. Tara, the Buddhist goddess of Compassion and offspring of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. From Nalanda. Nalanda Museum.

Pl. 17. Uddiyana Murukulla, a Tantric deity. Pala period. Gilted brass. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 18. Manasa-devi, consort of the sage Jaratkaru and sister of the serpent Sesha. Also called Padmavati or Vishahara. From North Bengal. Post-Gupta period. Bronze. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 19. Buddha's descent from the Trayastrimsa Heaven which he visited to preach to his mother. Here he is flanked by Brahma and Indra. From Kurkihar, Bihar. Pala period. 9th-10th century A.D. Patna Museum.

Pl. 20. Seated Tara, the Buddhist goddess of Compassion and Mercy, with right hand in Varada Mudra, seated on a lion throne. From Kurkihar, Bihar. Pala period. C. 9th century A.D. Bronze. Patna Museum.

Pl. 21. Rishabhananatha, the first Jain Tirthankara. From Akota. C. 7th century A.D. Bronze. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 22. Head of Rishabhanatha, the first Jain Tirthankara. From Akota. Bronze. 7th century A.D. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 23. Tritirthika of Parsvanatha, the 23rd Jain Tirthankara. From Akota. C. 7th century A.D. Bronze. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 24. Chaturvimsatti-patta of Rishabhanatha. From Akota. C. 7th-8th century A.D.

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Bronze. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 25. Chamardharini (chauri or fly-whisk bearer). From Akota. C. 7th-8th century A.D. Bronze. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 26. Tritirthika of Parsvanatha, the 23rd Jain Tirthankara. From Akota. C. 7th century A.D. Bronze. Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

Pl. 27. Krishna. From Nepal. Copper-gilt. C. 17th-18th century A.D. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 28. Green Tara, the Buddhist goddess of Mercy and Compassion. From Nepal. C. 16th century A.D. Copper-gilt. Height, about 38 cms. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 29. Close-up of Tara of Plate 28.

Pl. 30. White Tara. From Swayambunath, Nepal. Brass. (Photo, Tibor Sekelj.)

Pl. 31. Bodhisattva Manjusari. From Nepal. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 32. Tara. From Nepal. C. 18th century A.D. Gilt-bronze. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 33. Avalokitesvara (Padmapani), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, with two Taras. From Nepal. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 34. Bodhisattva Raktalokesvara with Dhanada Tara. From Nepal. Gilted. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 35. Standing figure of Vishnu. From Nepal. 9th-10th century A.D. Copper-gilt and jewelled. Height, about 22 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

Pl. 36. Buddhist deity Katchkra holding Shakti. From Tibet. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 37. Arhat. From Tibet. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 38. Tibetan form of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara with a thousand hands and multi-headed. From Tibet. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 39. Varuna, god of the oceans. From Tibet. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 40. Navanita-nritta-Krishna—Krishna as a young child, a ball of butter in his right hand, dancing with joy. Archaeological Museum, Gwalior.

Pl. 41. Venugopala—Krishna playing the flute—with his two wives, Rukmini and Satyabhama. From Chimakurti. Late Eastern Chalukyan. Probably about A.D. 1600, but it has been dated as early as the 11th century A.D. Height, 22.5 cms. (Venugopala); 18.5 cms. (Rukmini and Satyabhama). Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 42. Nataraja. From South India. Chola period. C. 12th century A.D. National Museum, New Delhi. (Photo copyright, National Museum.)

Pl. 43. Nataraja. From Tiruvarangulam, Tiruchirapalli district. Early Chola period. About the end of the third quarter of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 72 cms. (Photo copyright, National Museum, New Delhi.)

Pl. 44. Rama. From South India. Bronze. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 45. Parvati, the consort of Shiva. From South India. Bronze. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 46. Ganesha. From a small temple at Thirukkarugavar, Thanjavur district. Bronze. (Photo, E. S. Mahalingam.)

Pl. 47. Dancing Ganesha. From Vedaranyam temple, Thanjavur district. Bronze. (Photo, N. Ramakrishna.)

Pl. 48. Mahakali, the terrific aspect of Shiva's consort. Chola transition period. 12th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 64 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 49. Shiva-Parvati, from a Somaskanda group, with their child Skanda missing (see page 42). From South India. Early Chola period. Later half of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 57 cms. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 50. Nataraja. From South India. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 51. Parvati. From Thanjavur district. Late Chola period. C. 13th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 66 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 52. Shiva-Uma-Sahita-murti. Shiva standing close to his consort Uma. From South India. Chola period. Bronze. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 53. Buddha. From South India. C. 11th-12th century A.D. Bronze. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 54. Shiva-Kankala-murti (see page 41). From Tirukkalar, Thanjavur district. Late Chola period. 13th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 34 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 55. Kannappa Nayanar, the Shaivite saint. From Tiruvelangadu, Chittoor district. Chola period. About the middle of the 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 50 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

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Pl. 56. Kaliyamardaka (see page 42). From South India. Bronze. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 57. Shiva as Nataraja. From Tiruvenlangadu, Chittoor district. Chola period. About the fourth decade of the 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 114.5 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 58. Shiva as Nataraja. From Kuram, Chingleput district. Pallava or early Chola period. Late 9th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 53 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 59. Hanuman. Probably from a group comprising Rama (Plate 66). From Vadakkupanaiyur, Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. About the beginning of the third quarter of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 58 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 60. Dancing Krishna. From South India. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 61. Bala-Krishna—Krishna as a child. C. 15th century A.D. National Museum, New Delhi. (Photo copyright, National Museum.)

Pl. 62. Vrishavahana-murti and Devi (see page 42). From Tiruvengadu, Thanjavur district. Chola period. Early 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 106.5 cms. (male figure); 93 cms. (female figure). Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 63. Ambika Devi or Parvati. From Tiruvelvikuddi, Thanjavur district. Vijayanagar period. 16th century A.D. Bronze. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 64. Nataraja. From South India. C. 13th century A.D. Bronze. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 65. Kalyana-Sundara-murti. Shiva taking Parvati's hand in marriage, with Vishnu standing on their right (see page 41). From Tiruvengadu, Thanjavur district. Chola period. Early 11th century A.D. Bronze. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 66. Rama. From Vadakkupanaiyur, Thanjavur district (see Plate 59). Early Chola period. About the beginning of the third quarter of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 112 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 67. Hayagriva, the horse-headed form of Vishnu, considered the god of learning (see page 41). From South India. Chola period. 12th-13th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 8.5 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire, Brussels.)

Pl. 68. Vinadhara-Dakshina-murti of Shiva, with the Veena not shown (see page 42). From Thanjavur district. Chola period. The closing years of the reign of Rajaraja I. Early part of the 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 86.5 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 69. Kalyana-Sundara-murti of Shiva. Shiva as the bridegroom (see page 41). From Tiruvelvikkudi, Thanjavur district. Chola period. About the end of the second decade of the 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, about 80 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 70. Kalyana-Sundara-murti of Shiva (see page 41). From Tiruvengadu, Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. C. 1000 A.D. Bronze. Height, 96.5 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 71. Shiva and Parvati, with the former seated in Sukhasana. From Kilayur, Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. 9th-10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 76 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 72. Brahma seated in Sukhasana. From South India. Post-Vijayanagar period. 18th century A.D. Bronze. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 73. Seated Buddha flanked by Nagaraja chauri-bearers. From Nagapattinum, Thanjavur district. Chola period. About the middle of 11th century A.D. May be of a later date. Bronze. Height, 74.5 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 74. Sita. From South India. Chola period. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 75. Parvati. From Ambavanodai, Thanjavur district. Vijayanagar period. 15th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 92 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 76. Maheswari, the consort of Shiva as the Supreme Lord. From Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. About the end of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 75 cms. Art Gallery, Thanjavur.

Pl. 77. Shiva-Vishaprahana-murti (see page 42). From Kilapuddanur, Thanjavur district. Pallava transition period. Later half of the 9th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 62 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 78. Shiva as Nataraja. From Velankanni, Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. About the last decade of the 10th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 84 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 79. Ardhanarisvara (see page 41). From Tiruvengadu, Thanjavur district. Early Chola period. 11th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 90 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

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Pl. 80. A goddess with attendant. From Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli district. About the middle of the 16th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 62 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 81. Bodhisattva Maitreya, front and back views. From Melayur, Thanjavur district. Late Pallava period. About the middle of the 9th century A.D. Copper-gilt, inlaid with silver. Height, 39.5 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 82. Parvati. From Jambavanodi, Tiruchirapalli district. Vijayanagar period. C. 16th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 93 cms. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 83. Subrahmanyam or Kartikeyya, the second son of Shiva, accompanied by one of his consorts Valli, wearing a Kacha-bandha (the other, Devasena, does not when represented). From South India. Government Museum, Madras.

Pl. 84. Bala-Krishna—Krishna as a child. From South India. Probably about the 16th century A.D. Copper. Height, 42 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

Pl. 85. Devi as Uma. Probably from a Somaskanda group. From South India. Chola period. 12th-13th century A.D. (Karl Khandalavala assigns it to the 11th century A.D.). Copper. Height, about 42 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

Pl. 86. Parvati. From South India. Chola period. C. 12th-13th century A.D. Height, 11.5 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire, Brussels.)

Pl. 87. Vishnu. From North India. C. 15th century A.D. Bronze. (Courtesy and photo, State Hermitage Museum, U.S.S.R.)

Pl. 88. Shiva as Nataraja. Front view. From South India. C. 15th century A.D., but could be as late as the 16th-17th century A.D. Copper. Height, 91.5 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

Pl. 89. Back view of Shiva Nataraja of Plate 88.

Pl. 90. Krishna in a dancing posture. Post-Vijayanagar period. 17th-18th century A.D. Bronze. National Museum, New Delhi. (Photo copyright, National Museum.)

Pl. 91. Shiva as Nataraja. From South India. Post-Vijayanagar period. C. 18th century A.D. Copper. (Courtesy and photo, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

Pl. 92. Three divine archers. From Central India. 18th-19th century A.D. Height, 37 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire, Brussels.)

Pl. 93. Deepa-Lakshmi. From Meenakshi temple, Madurai. Nayak period. 17th century A.D. Brass.

Pl. 94. Probably a temple lamp. From Tibet. Brass. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Pl. 95. Deepa-Lakshmi. Front and back views. From Gujarat. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 96. Deepa-Lakshmi. Late period. (Photo copyright, A.S. Vaswani.)

Pl. 97. Deepa-Lakshmi. 16th-17th century A.D. Brass. Height, 21.8 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire, Brussels.)

Pl. 98. Deepa-Lakshmi. From Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. Kakatiya period. 12th-13th century A.D. Height, 15.5. cms. National Museum, New Delhi.

Pl. 99. Elephant. Provenance and date uncertain. Copper. Height, 20 cms. (Courtesy and photo, Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire, Brussels.)

Pl. 100. Aiyanar (offspring of Shiva and Mohini, the female form taken by Vishnu during the churning of the ocean for ambrosia), riding on an elephant. From Togur, Thanjavur district. Late Chola period. 12th century A.D. Bronze. Height, 57 cms. Government Museum, Madras.

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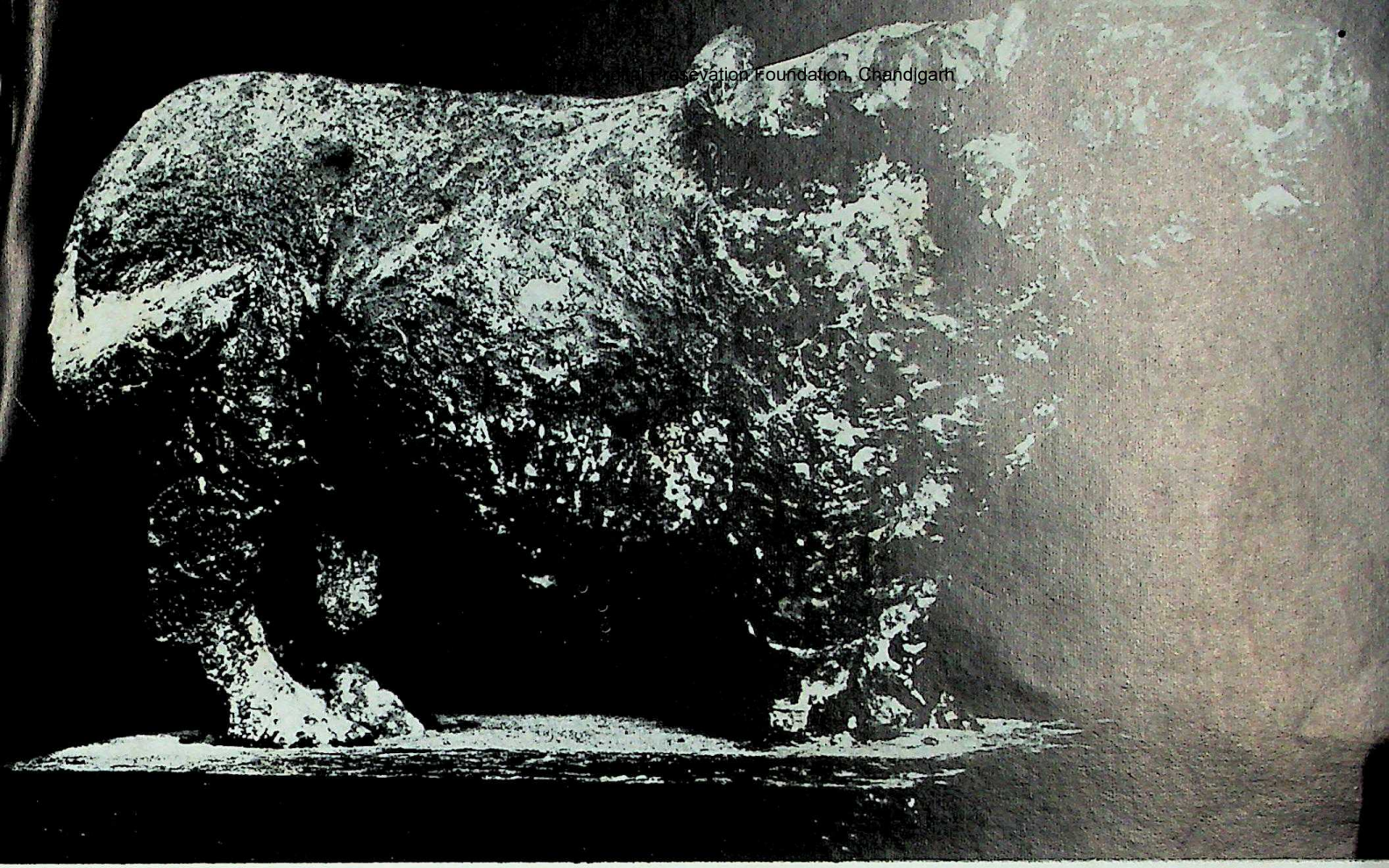

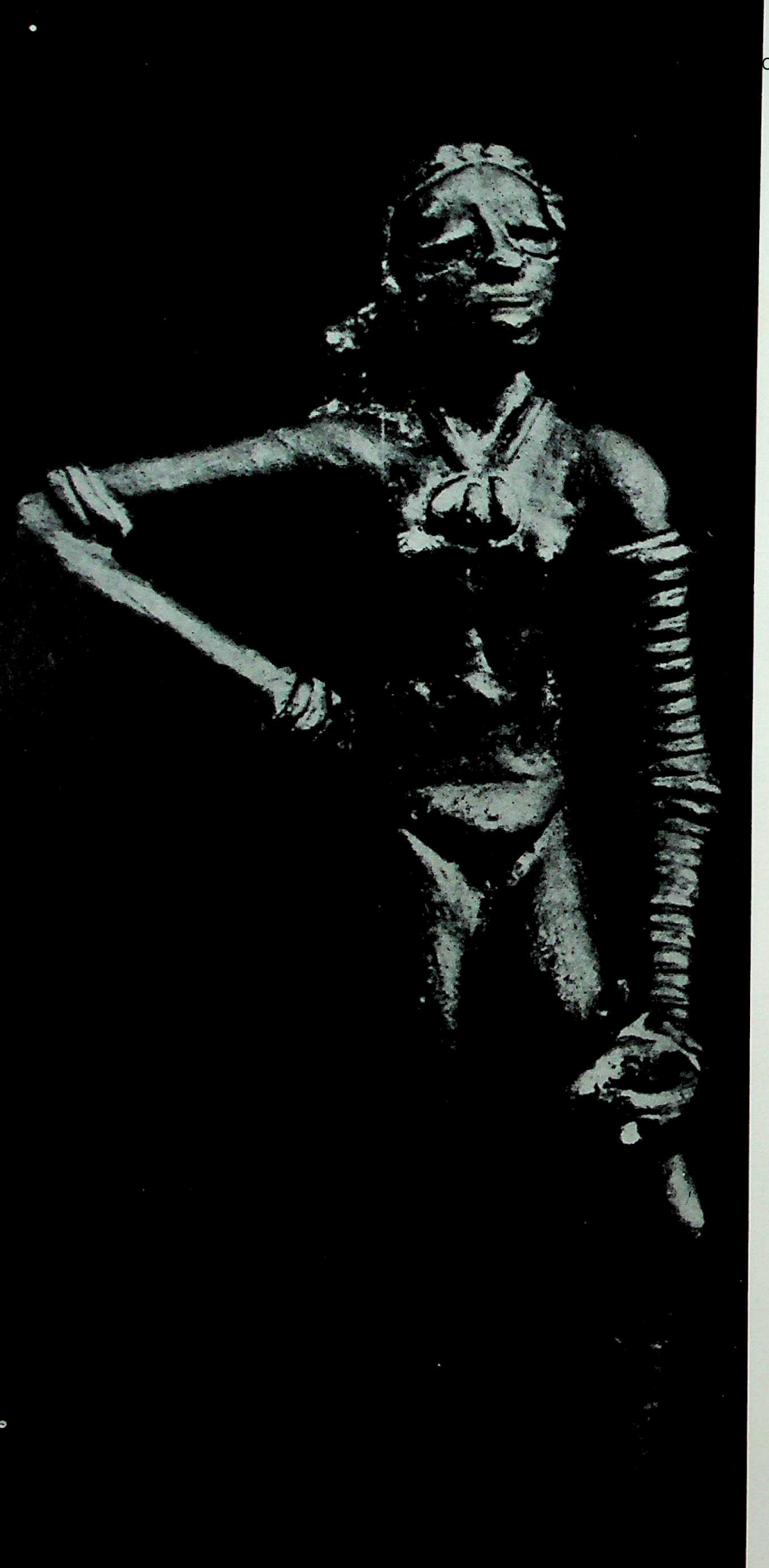

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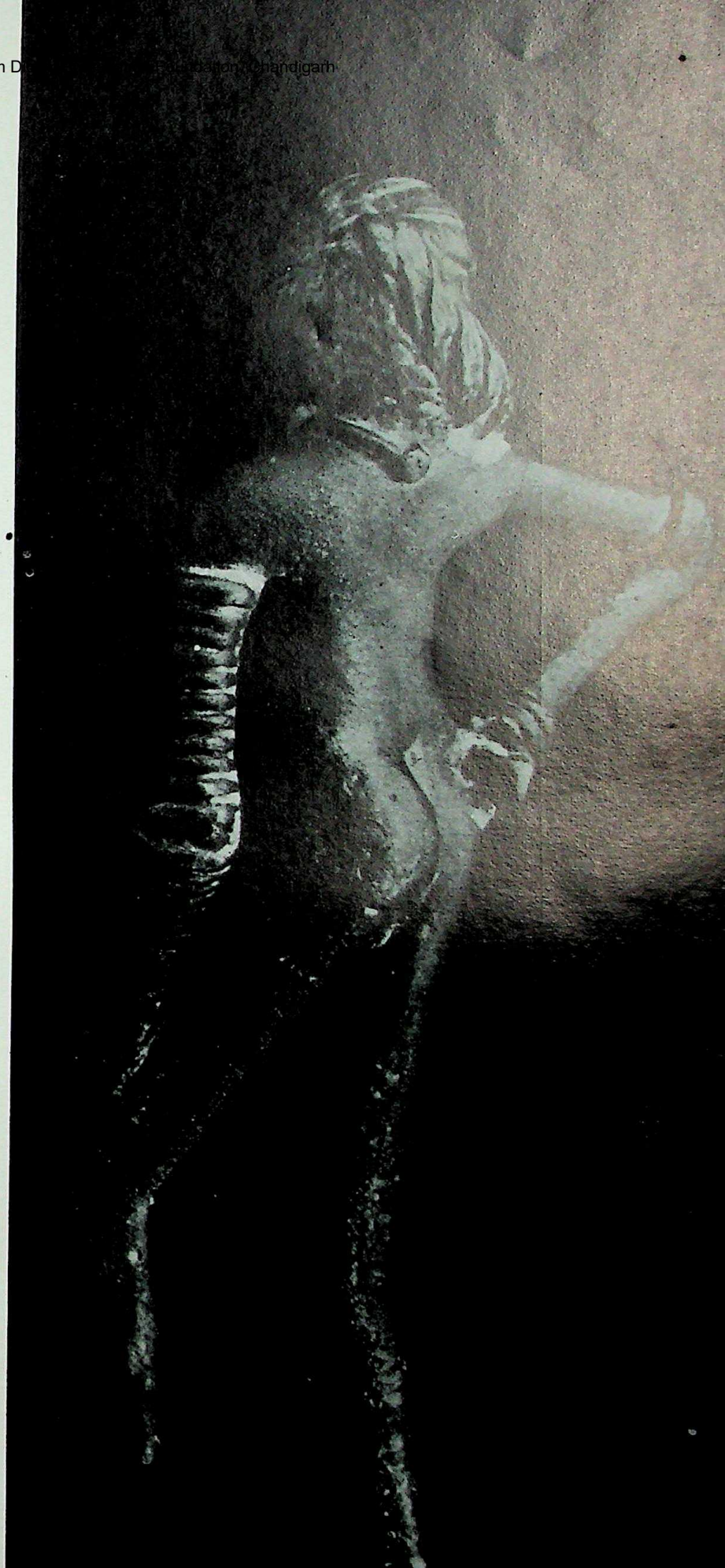

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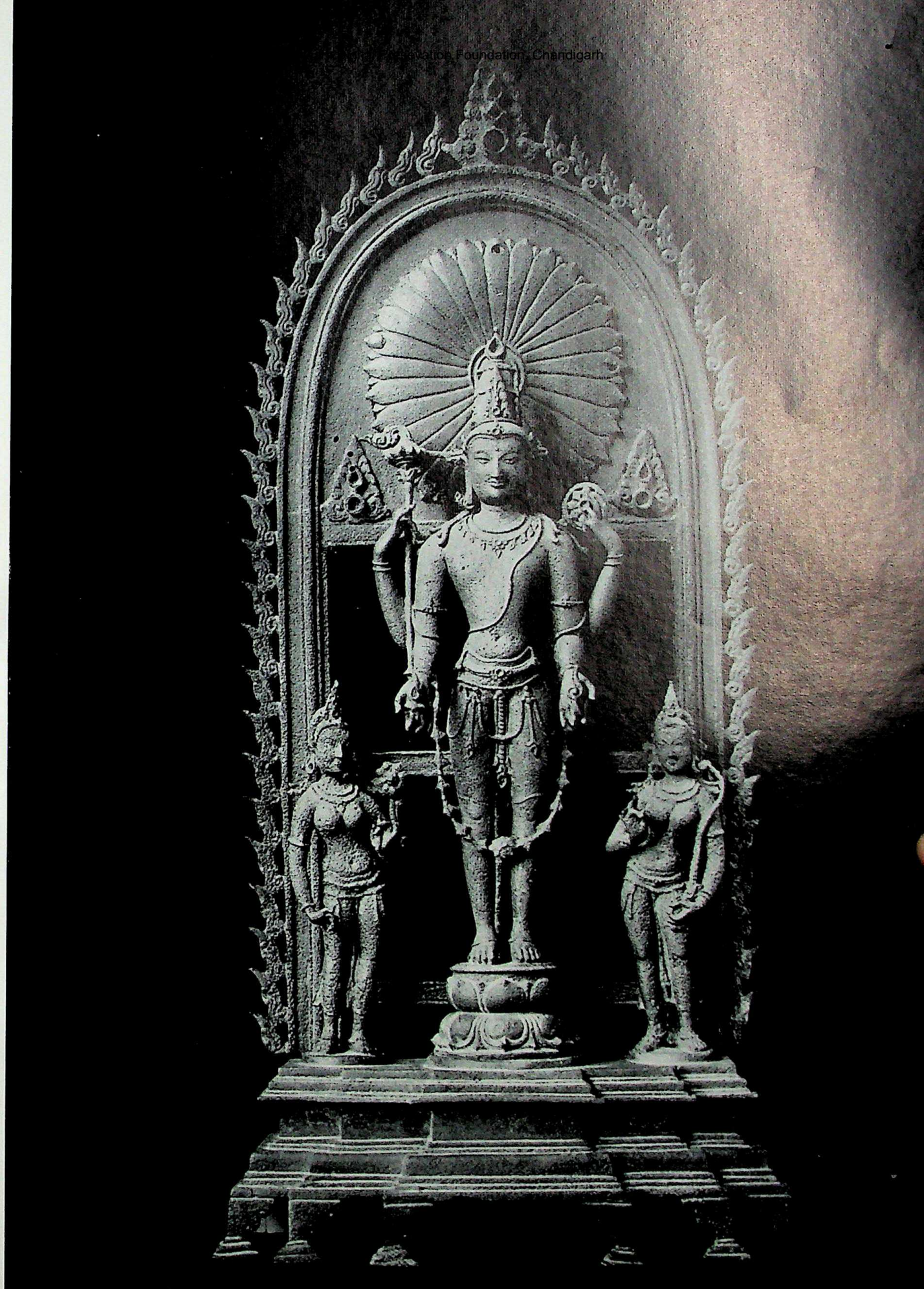

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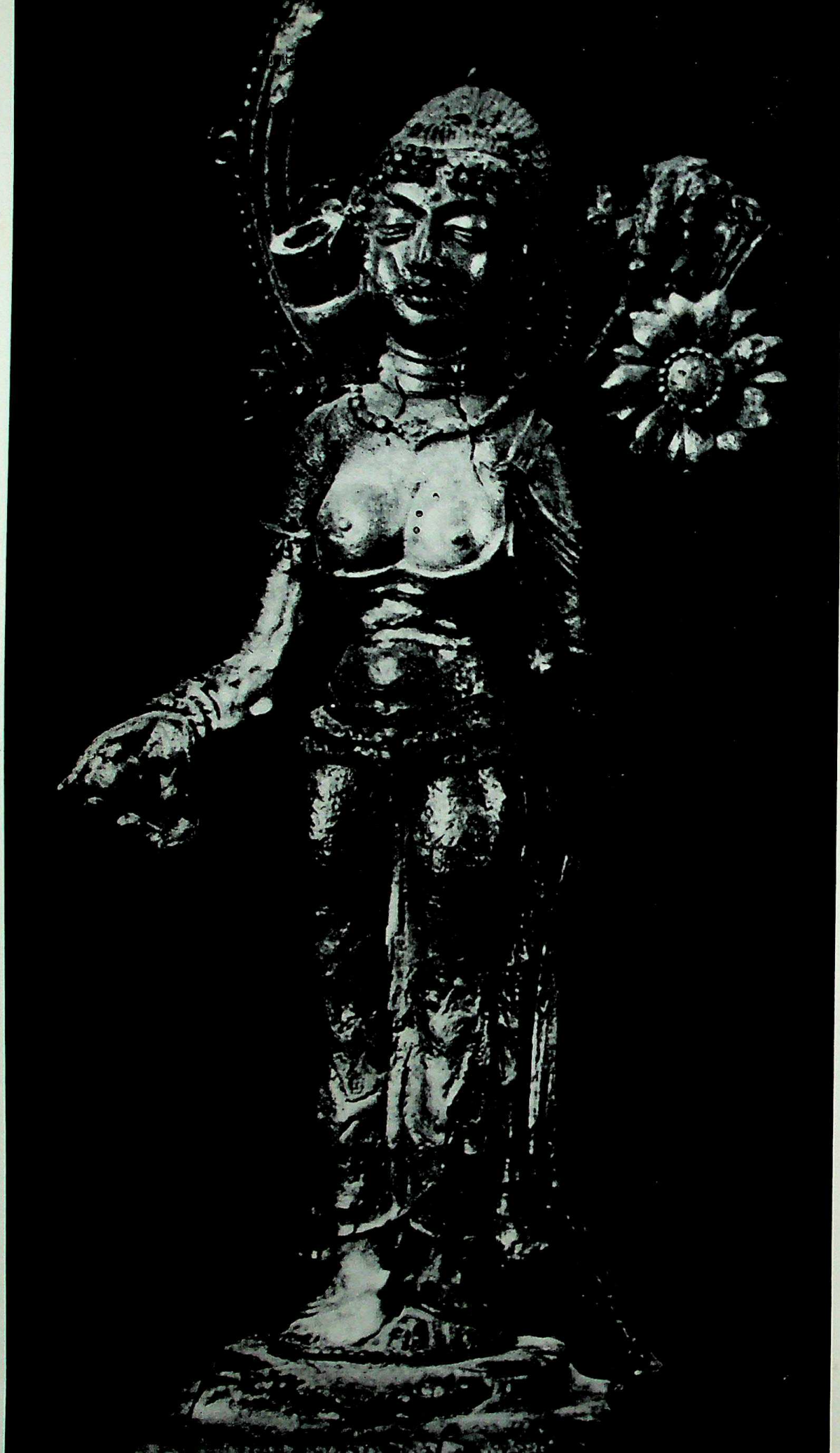

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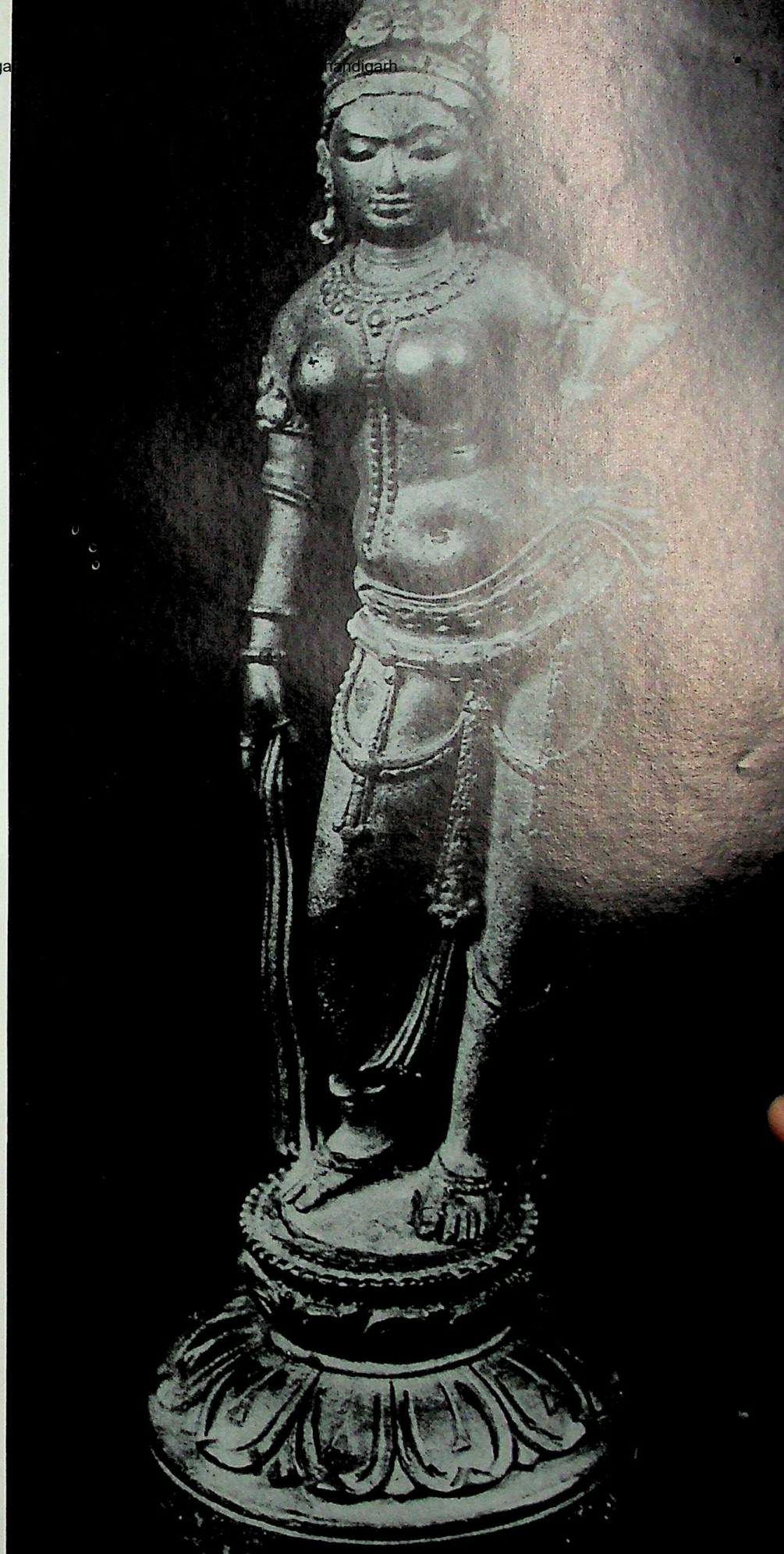

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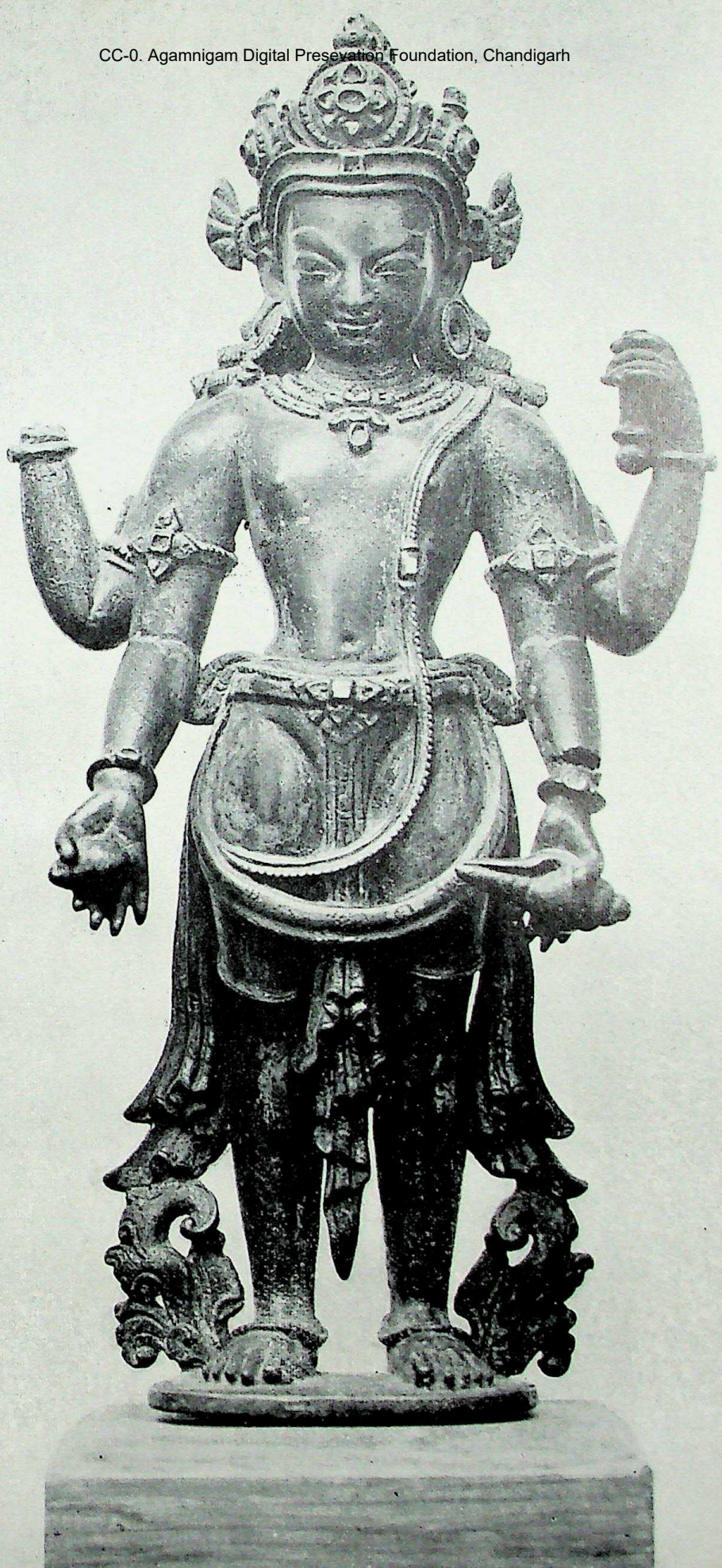

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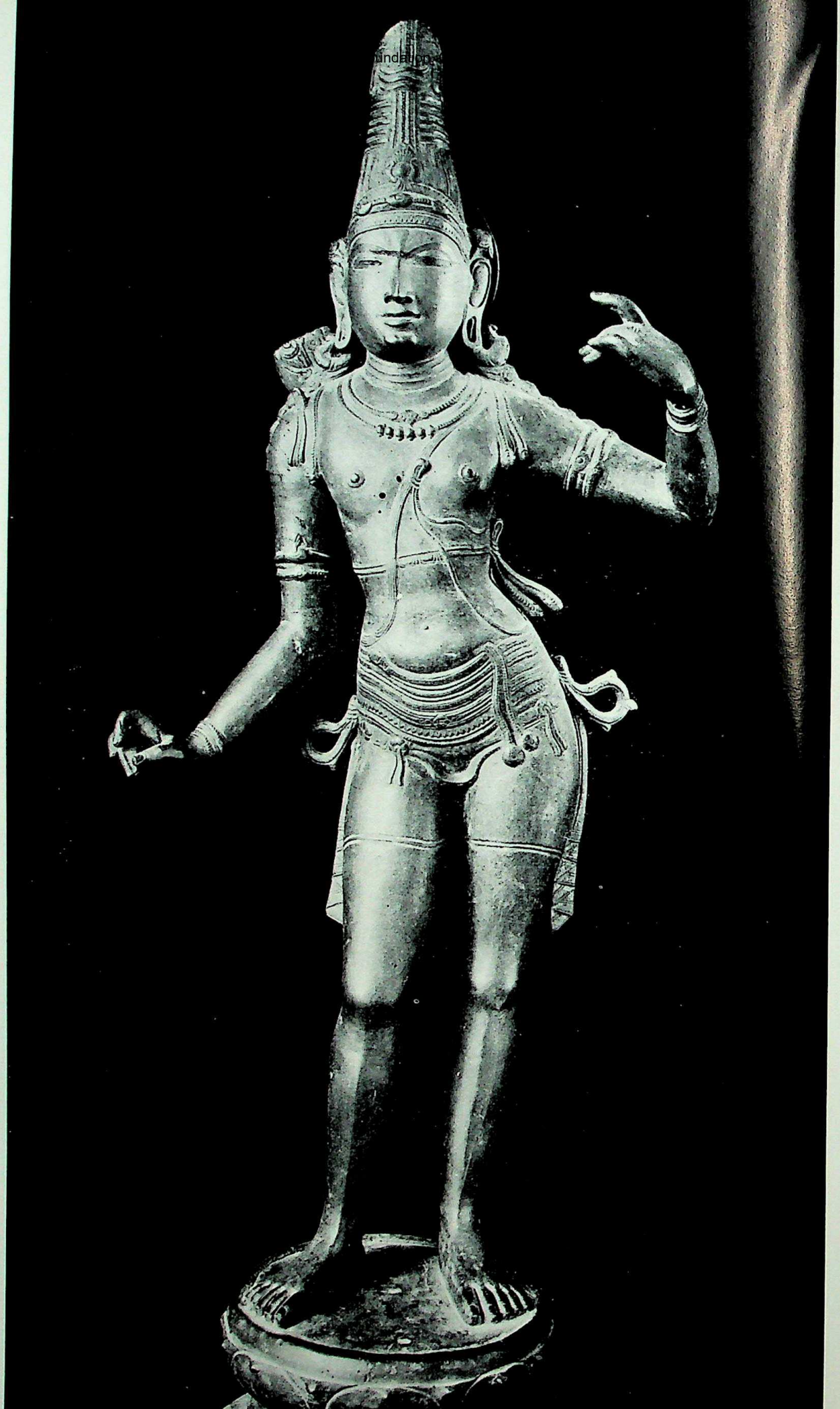

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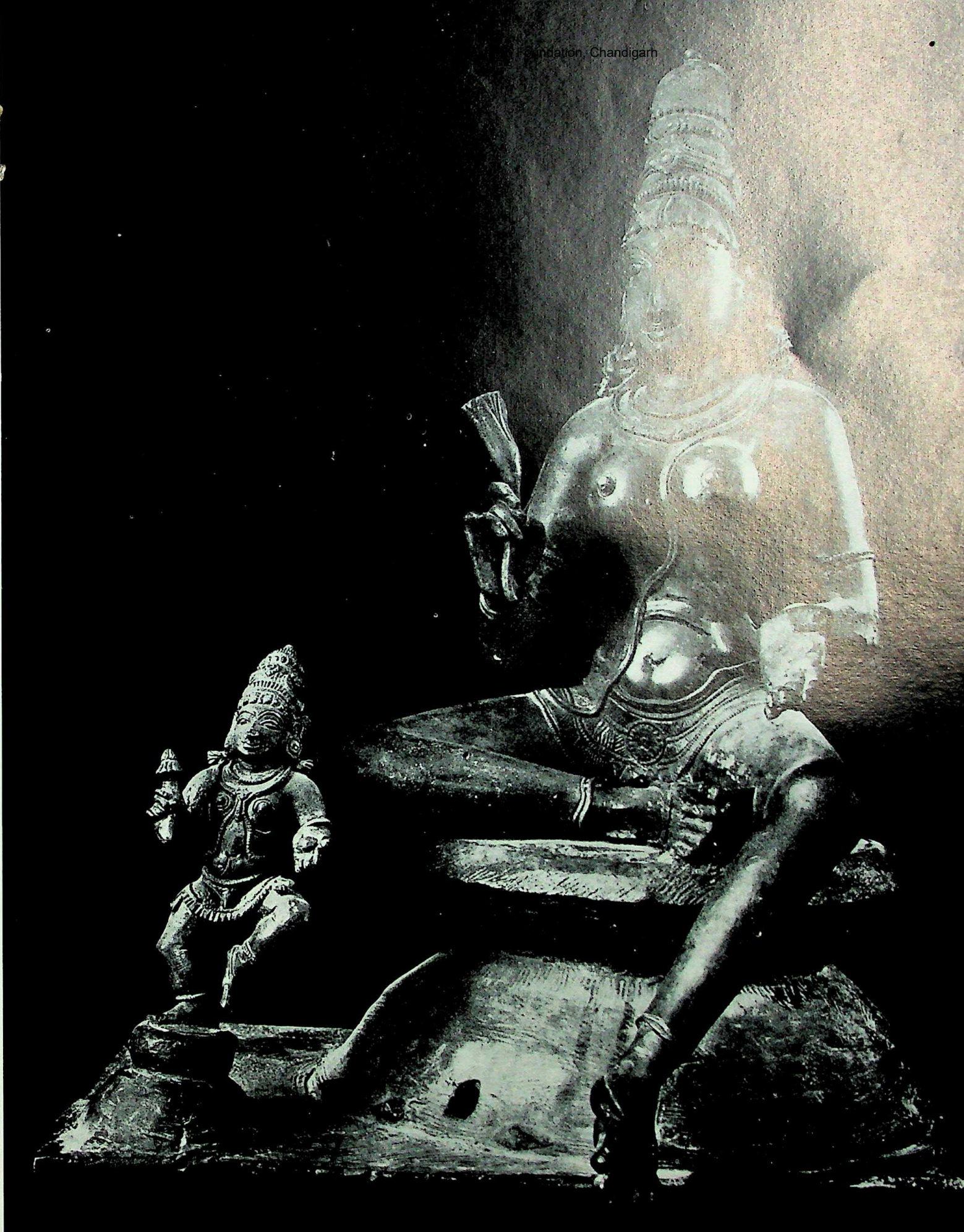

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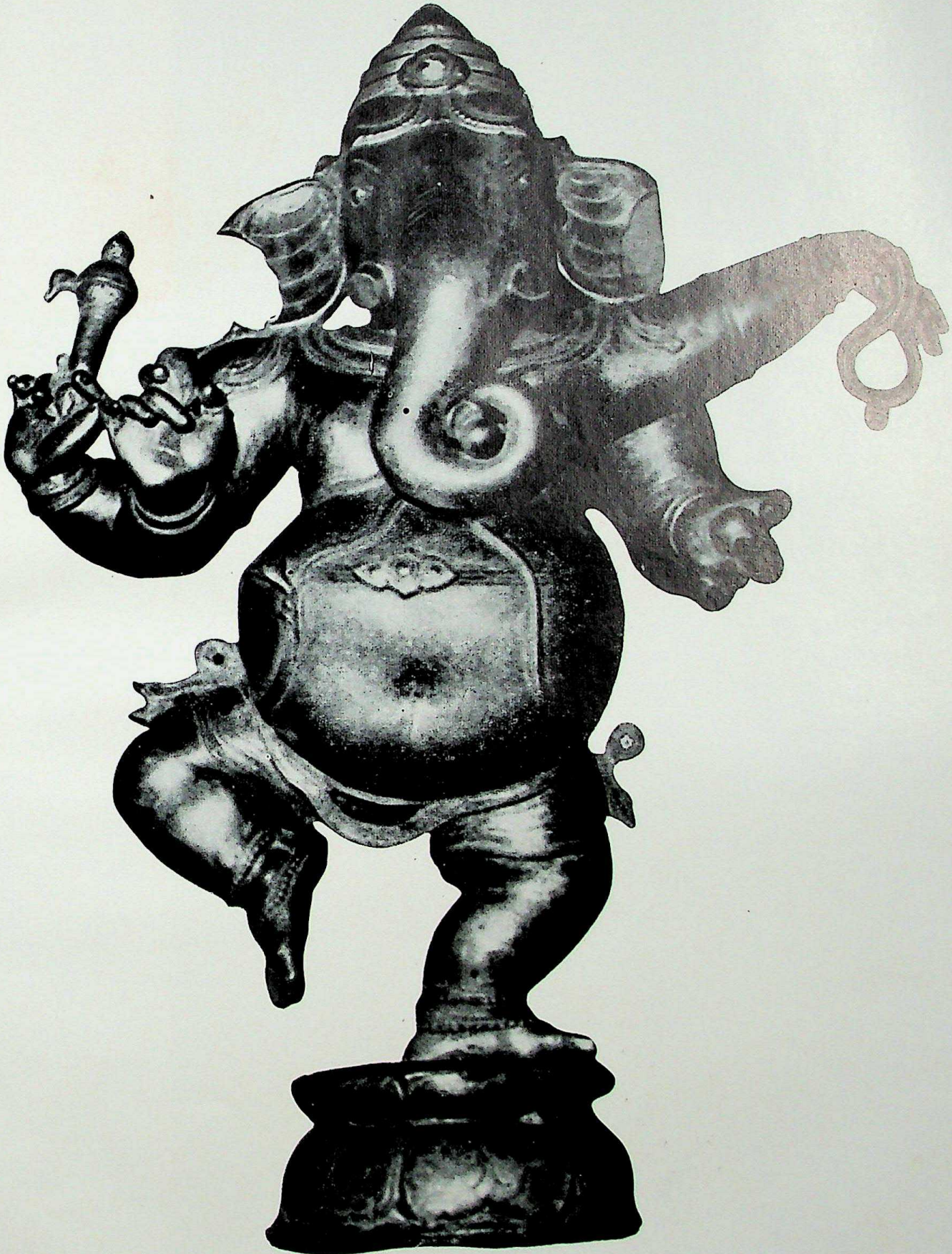

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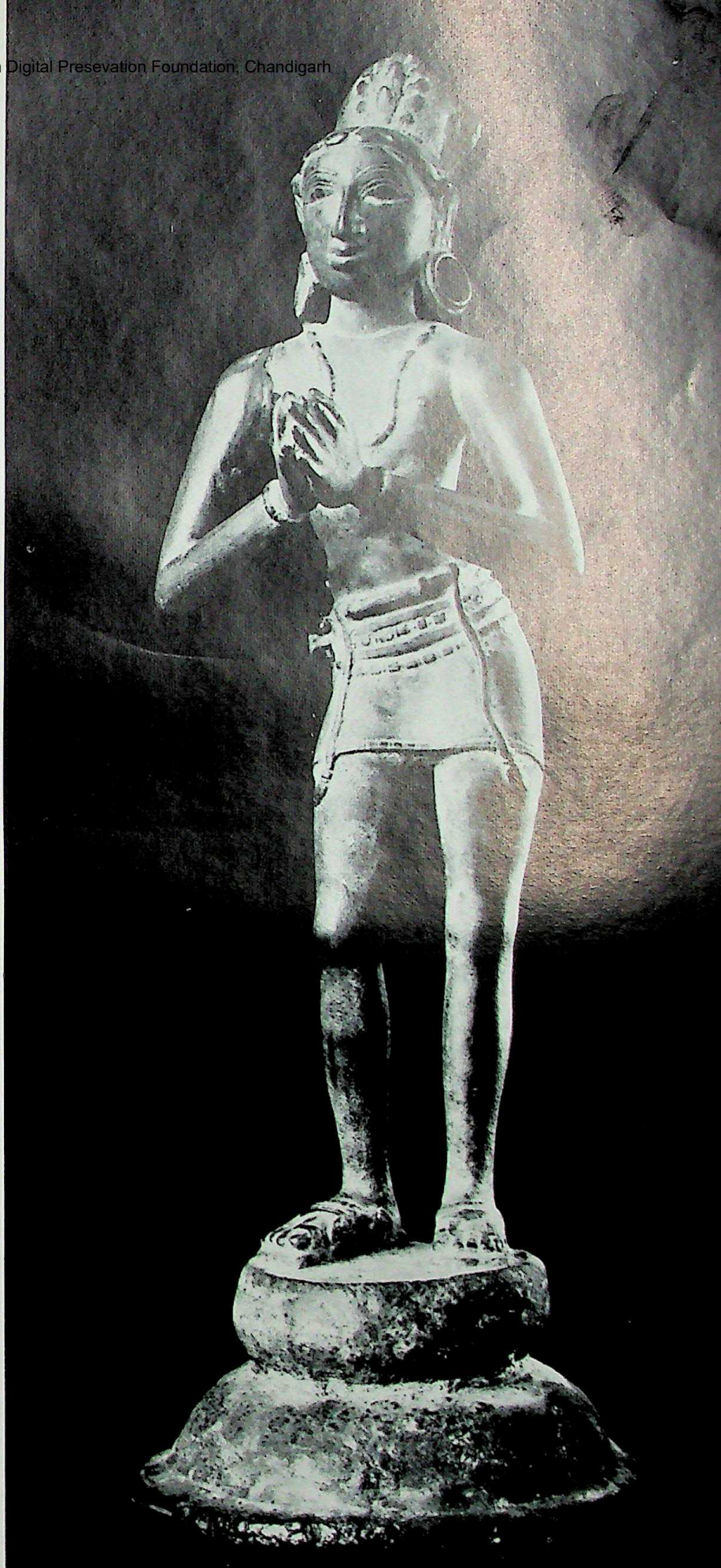

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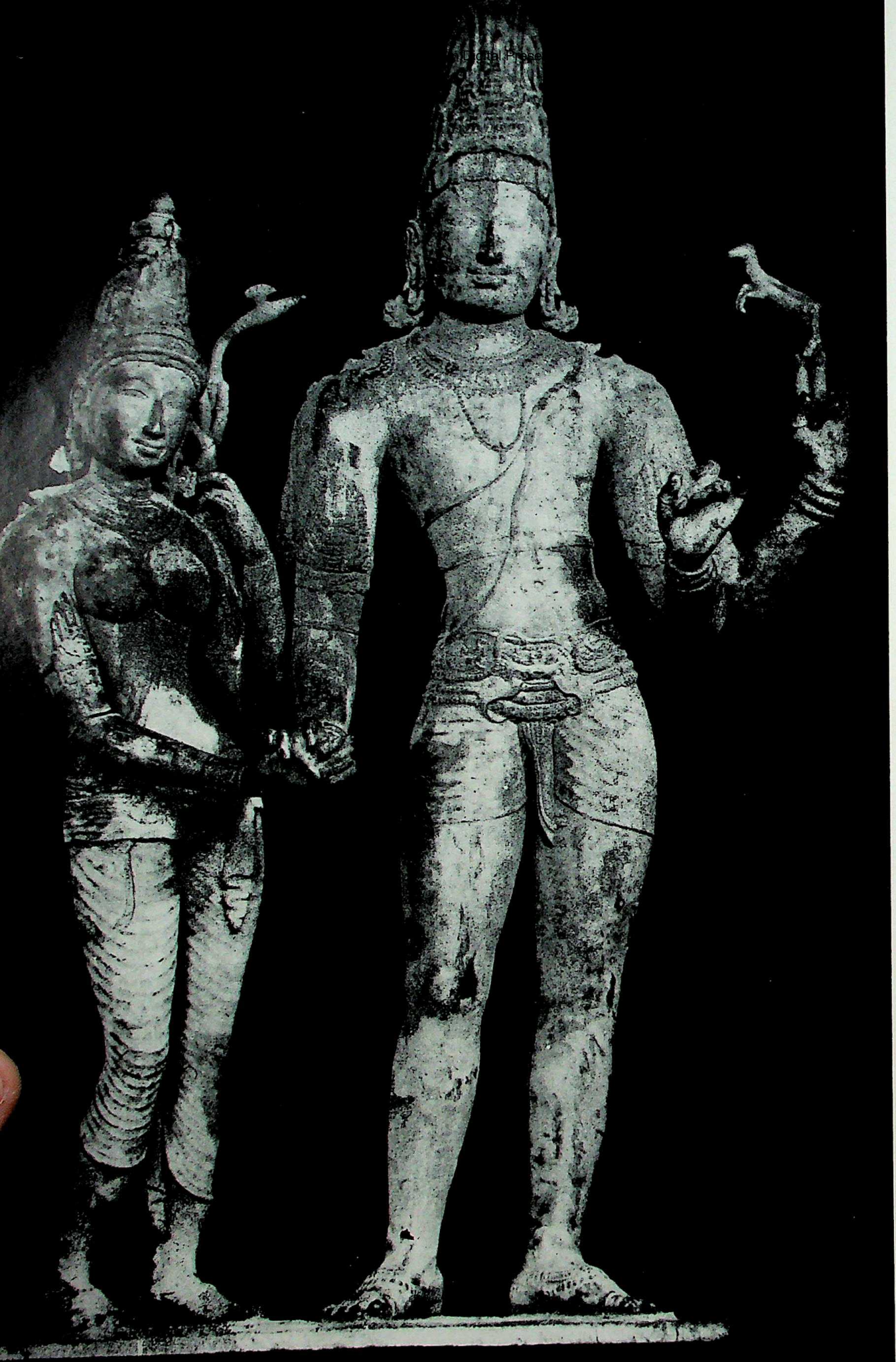

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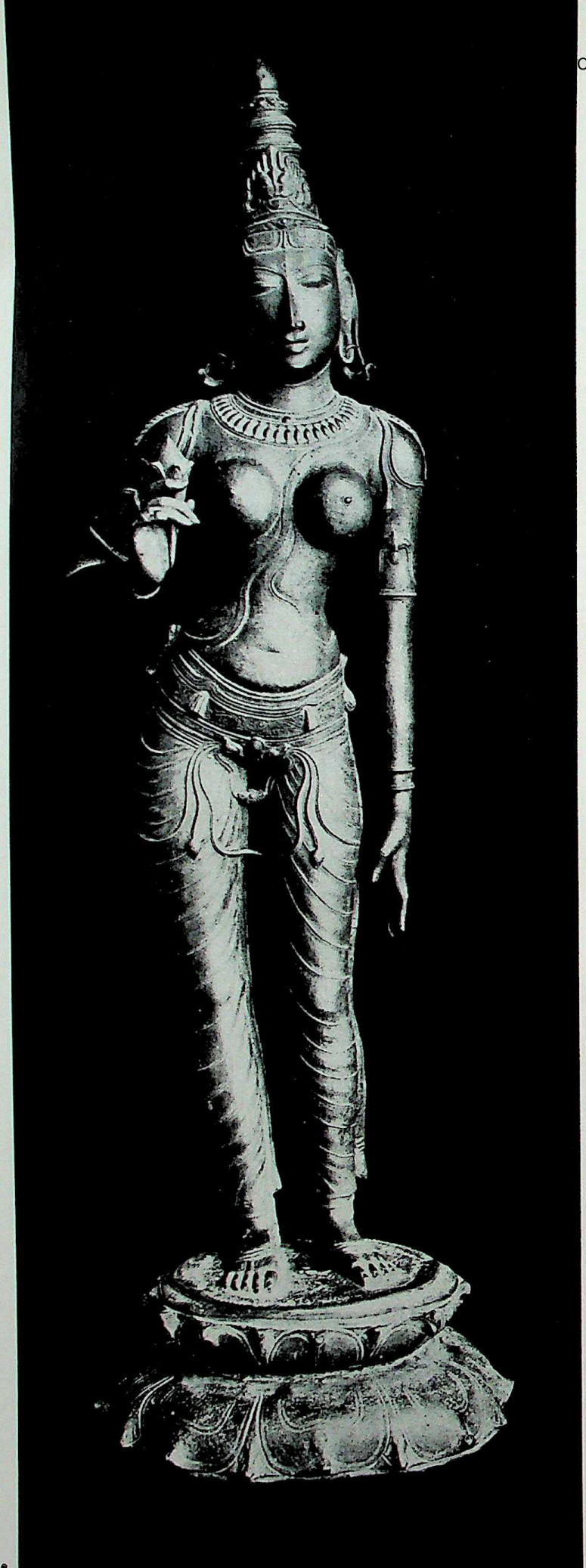

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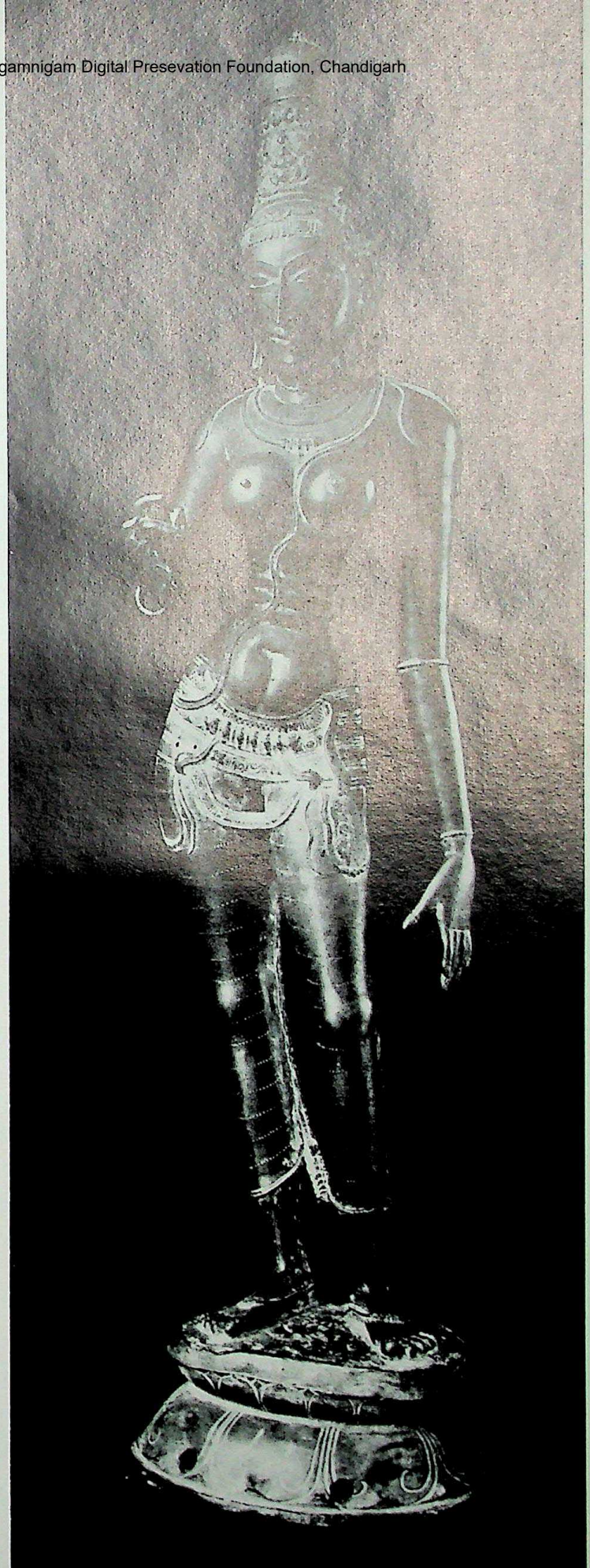

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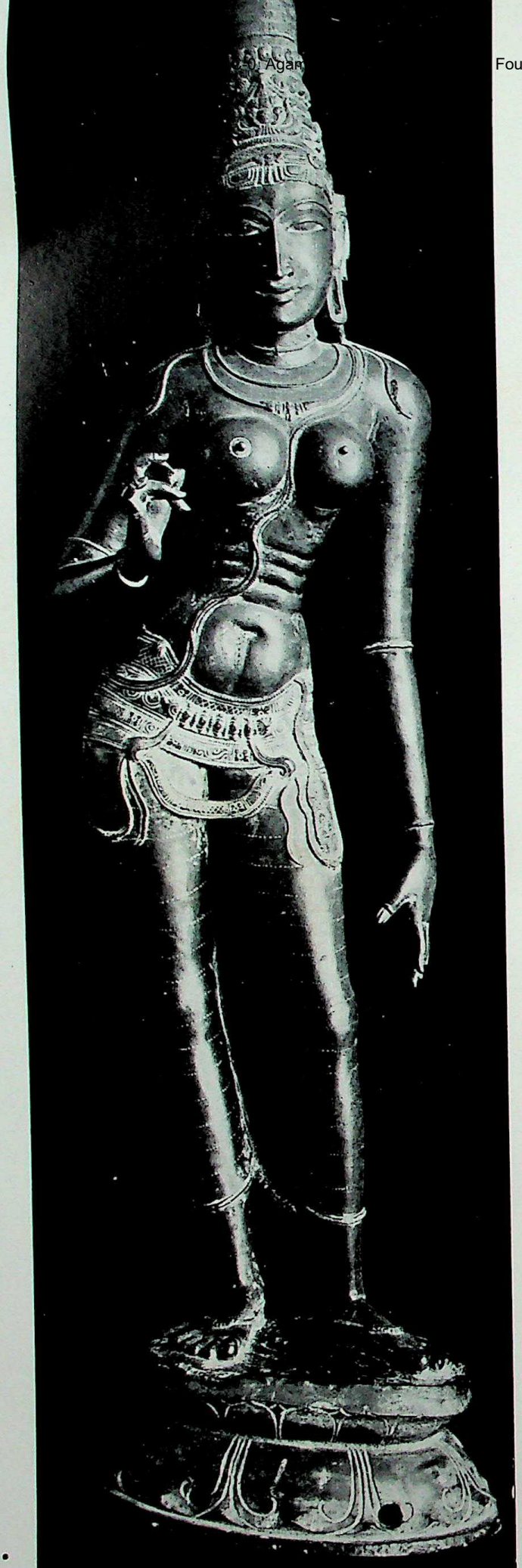

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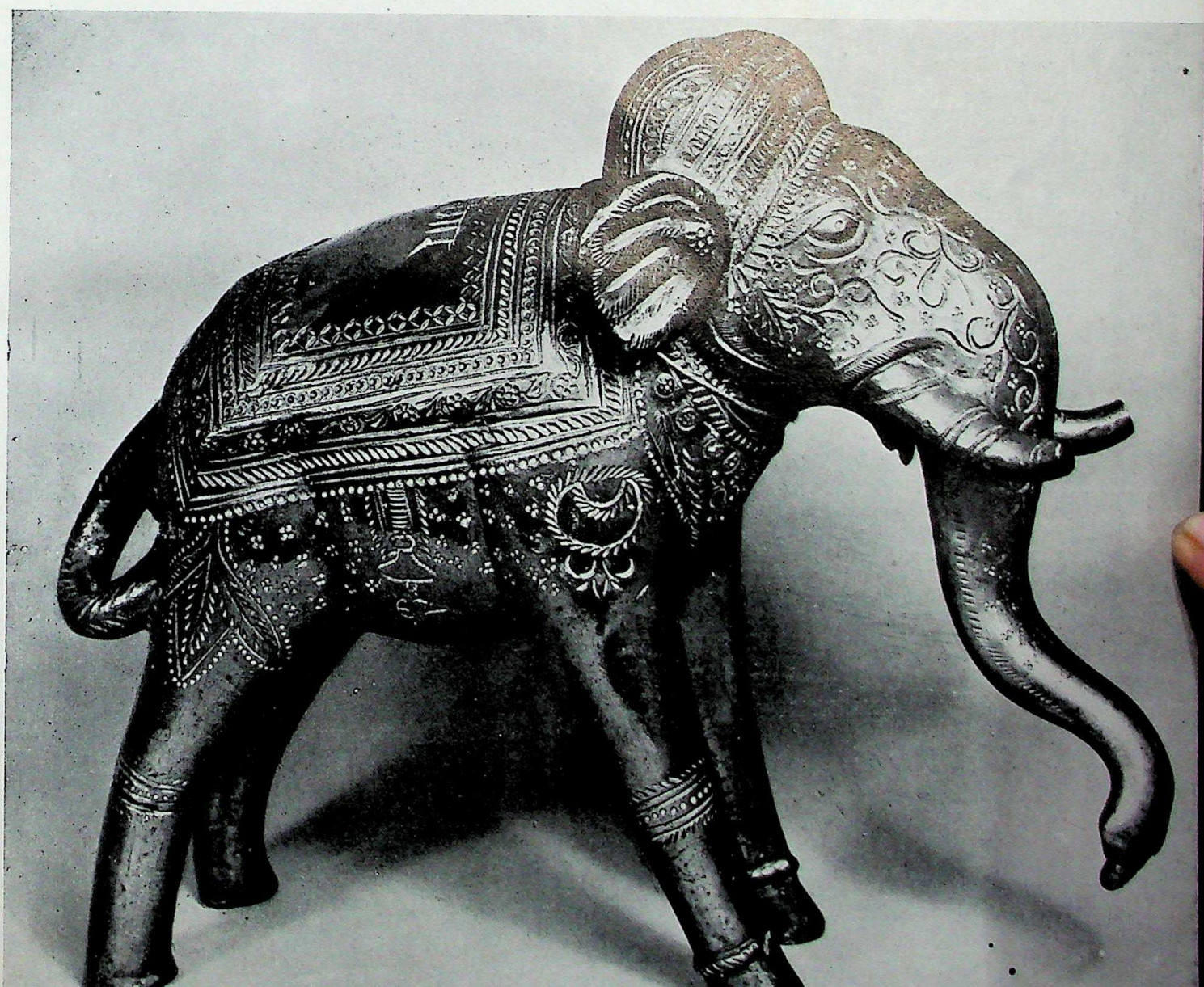

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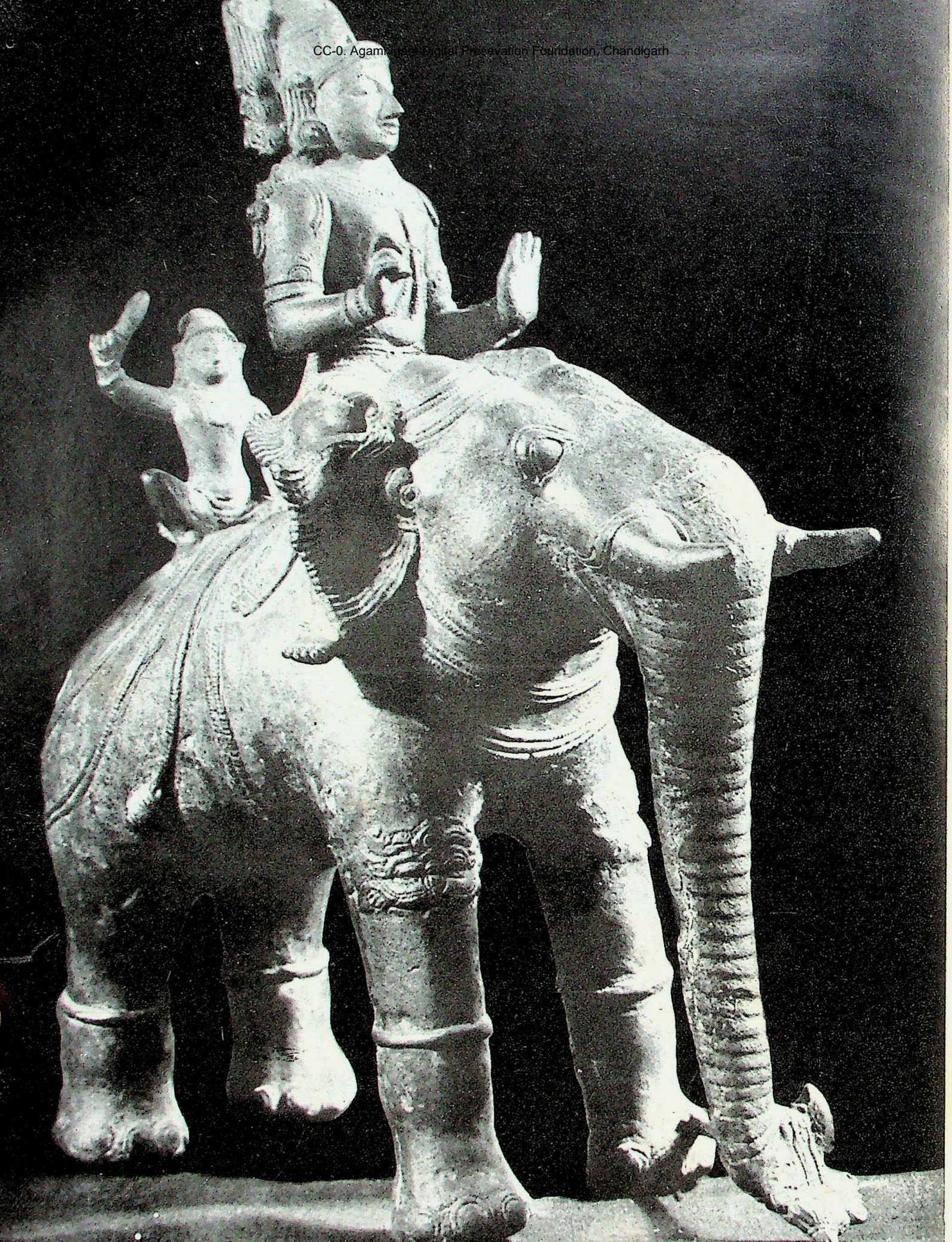

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